

by Donna Schaper



God, I Cannot Call You Father



God, I cannot call you Father.
Sometimes I cannot even call you Mother.
And yet I know that you continue to call me daughter.

Words don't mean anything they say.
Learn to speak half a language.
Learn to call God half a name.

But you, O God, rage with me.
My ears matter. Words matter to me.
And they matter to You as well.

You are gentle in the face of the insult.
In the face of half a name.
But I am not.

Father-God, Mother-God, teach us how to speak.
Forgive the idolatry.
Show us the way to your Name.

You throw in your lot with us.
You share with us the power to name.
You choose sometimes to break out of your parent.
To be brother or wind, fire or spirit.
To be hidden.
To be other than who we think You are.

She dwells among us.
He walks the road we walk.
She carries our burdens.
He liberates us.
And yet we don't even know Her.
We mistake Him for one half of us.

She did send a Man.
The man Jesus.
The concrete human.
Who must have gender.
The form of God.
When He chose to be more than parent.

But she stayed above
our captivity and his captivity
to concreteness.
She kept a bit of mystery.
He kept the wind at her disposal.
She saved the fire for his presence.

Beyond Mother and beyond Father,
Beyond even Parent.
O God, you live.
Willing to let us address you
Willing to let us call your name
And smiling, beyond your rage.

Hear us when we call.
Respond even when we name You.
With your own names.
And name us, O God.
Call me daughter. Call me sister.
Call me a woman whom the spirit has known.

Give me the concreteness you gave your Son.
Honor my partialness.
And reveal, again and again, your mystery.

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Thomas Aquinas in the Summa Theologica states that all names for God are analogies. God is "father", but not a human male, "mother" but not a female, "rock of our salvation," but not made of stone certainly, "Rose of Sharon," but not a flower, "eagle" and "hen" but not a bird. To say other wise is to lessen the infinitude of God.

Customs and myths, rituals and usages become established in cultures and remain long after their usefulness has ended. Language is like this. Theologian Robert Jensen says "A language activity pursued in defiance of history, with ears stopped to the question of meaning, will pervert and distort all life. The language itself that is thus made a weapon against sense and honesty will disintegrate inwardly until its utterances arrive at that point of logical chaos where they are nonsensical. A life that sought its religious reality in such empty words would be what is meant by hell."

Tillich speaks of myths which have outlived their usefulness as "broken" myths. The warrior God, Jahweh, to a generation that is sick of the conquest of small nations by the powerful, might well be a mythic concept which has outlived its time, and an analogy which may need to be replaced by another. It is not Jahweh but the tribal warrior myth which is the "broken" image, and other descriptions and attributes need to be found for Jahweh/Eloi. They are there.

I was a child whose mother abandoned the family when I was not yet a year old, and I grew up motherless. It was with great joy that I discovered the concept of El Shaddai — the God who nurtures us at the breast — from the Hebrew word for breast shad. Here was an infinite mother whom I had not experienced in childhood, and who would now hold me eternally. I had an earthly father, a harsh, cold, arrogant and vengeful Calvinist minister. For me, the concept of "God as Father" brings images of a stern, forbidding, angry Jahweh, the jealous God, disapproving and condemning. How different another person's image might be. Many of us had loving mothers, nurturing and caring; many of us had fathers who loved, protected, and guided us in our childhood and youth, and even into adulthood. Because of his attitude toward my homosexuality, I have not seen my father but three times in 20 years. I am still not welcome at home.

God as "Father" for me is an unhappy image. God as El Shaddai provides me with a loving alternative.

For many people in our community, the use of "father" or "mother" as a name for God may well be an unfortunate choice.

To doctrinally insist that we worship "God the Father" may well divide many people who need to be included in our community.

We must not mistake God for our words for God; God does not change although our efforts to describe God may.

All names for God are accurate images of God, for it was Origen who first helped us to realize that all names for God are

merely images, pictures. No name for God truly succeeds in describing God. If we are honest, we have no word for God which truly captures all of God's attributes. Yet every way we speak of God describes some attribute accurately.

How shall we name God? How shall we speak of God? Scripture speaks to us of God's words in describing Godself only in action, or as Mary Daly affirms, "God as Verb." We know God not as something we can look at and name (nominally) but verbally, by what God does. Hebrew, by its structure, is a verbal language. All things are named by their function. In Hebrew, we find a God who says, "I am the Lord thy God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt." God describing Godself by action. Asked for a name, God's reply was "I AM THAT I AM" (or more accurately, "I AM WHAT I AM BECOMING") and God, whose very name is action.

We become so sure of our knowledge of God. What do we actually know of the nature of God? Jesus says, "God is spirit, and we must worship God in spirit and in truth." God is spirit — ineffable, untouchable, truly unnamable. Our temptation is always to limit God to what WE know. What do we know? Only that God is like us in that we are in God's image, but that God is other than us because it would be hubris to think that we are God. We are in God's image and after God's likeness. I am female and a mother. If I am like God, God must be female and a mother. You are male and a father? God must be like you and a father. What of my sister who has never borne a child, or my brother who has not sired one? Is God not like them also? Are they not also in the likeness and image of God?

All images of God are true, yet none of them is complete. God is like a mother, a father, a rock, an eagle, a hen, a creative hand, a voice in the whirlwind, a non-consuming fire; but God is not these and only these. God is all this and infinitely more — Creator, ground of our being, the unknowable, yet capable of being known and loved, capable of loving us and acting as a powerful personal presence in our lives.

For you "Father" is a summation. For me, "El Shaddai" answers a deep-felt need. For each of us one attribute outweighs another, but which IS God? What is God? We only have the visions of those who have caught a glimpse of the glory, and with Origen and Thomas Aquinas, we can only agree that by whatever image we describe God, our description is an analogy. I can tell you what God is like — I cannot tell you what God is. Tell me what God is like for you. Let us share our visions, but let us not limit each other's view of the glory.

There is a Zen proverb which says, "The finger that points at the moon is not the moon." Our different images for God merely point us to the same ultimate reality. Let us not insist we all point with the same finger, but let us keep on pointing to God, whom all may worship in spirit and in truth. †

By REV. MARGE RAGONA



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Missal Stand and Altar Book

The missal stand holds the large service book (*Lutheran Book of Worship Ministers Edition*). It may be a wood or metal bookstand, or simply be a cushion on which the service book rests for the celebration of the Eucharist. The missal stand and altar book should be removed when not in use.

Eucharistic Vessels

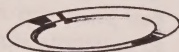
Vessels used for the celebration of the Holy Communion usually constitute a matched set of fine metal such as silver or gold. Pewter or earthenware vessels may also be used. The appearance and material of the vessels should be worthy of the precious elements they hold—containers appropriate for the body and blood of our Lord. A minimum set of eucharistic vessels includes a chalice, paten, and flagon or cruet. If hosts (rather than a whole loaf of bread) are used, a ciborium or host box is also needed.



The chalice is the large cup used for the consecration and distribution of the sacramental wine. The cup portion of the chalice is attached to the base (or foot) by the stem. If the distribution is not by common cup, the chalice needs a pouring lip. In this situation, the wine is poured from the chalice into a small glass held by the communicant. Prefilled individual glasses should *never* be used. Increasingly, congregations are returning to the traditional common cup, because it is a fuller symbol of the unity we share in Christ.

The paten is the plate used for the sacramental bread. Its size depends on the type of bread used. It is traditional practice for the paten to be set on the rim of the chalice for vesting in veil and burse. When a whole loaf of bread is used, however, another larger paten or basket is usually also needed.

A flagon or cruet is usually used to hold the wine before it is poured into the chalice. The flagon is a tall covered pitcher,



usually made of fine metal. The cruet is a glass vessel with a stopper, often topped with a cross.

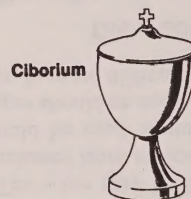


Flagon



Cruet

When hosts (wafers) rather than a loaf of bread are used, they are kept in a ciborium or host box. A ciborium is similar to a chalice, but has a fitted lid. A host box (also known as a pyx) is a short round container with a lid.



Ciborium



Host Box

In some congregations the presiding minister ritually cleanses his or her hands prior to the Great Thanksgiving. For this, a small dish known as a lavabo bowl is used. The water is poured over the hands from a cruet, and the hands are dried with a lavabo towel. This is a small linen towel, usually twelve by eighteen inches. It is folded lengthwise, right side out, in thirds, so that it will hang evenly over the arm of the assisting minister or acolyte.

A spoon is sometimes useful for removing foreign particles from the wine in a chalice. The bowl of a spoon made for this purpose is perforated.

The Elements

At the Last Supper, our Lord took bread and wine, gave thanks to God, and declared that they were his body and blood! He shared the bread and wine with his disciples, and told them to "Do this for the remembrance" of him. After his crucifixion and resurrection, he revealed himself to two of his disciples on the Emmaus road in the breaking of bread. Christ's followers of all times have had an insatiable appetite for this bread and wine, because they know that in them the Lord himself is present. When the prayer and actions of the Upper Room are repeated by the presiding minister, we share the very life of the crucified and risen Christ. The Lord is truly present "in, with, and under" the bread and the wine in the Holy Communion.

Bread signifies several things biblically and in our own time. The ancient Israelites believed that bread came from the hands of God—and indeed, in the Eucharist, it does. Bread also carries the image of death and resurrection: the wheat seed is buried in the earth, where it comes to life and sprouts; and then the grain is crushed to be harvested so that flour can be made and bread can rise. Bread also, of course, satisfies basic human hunger.

The early Christian church always used ordinary bread for Holy Communion, a practice that is still preferred. A whole loaf of bread has advantages over individual wafers, because the one loaf is a powerful symbol of our unity in Christ: "When we break the bread, is it not a means of sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, many as we are, are one body; for it is one loaf of which we all partake" (1 Cor. 10:16-17, NEB). The breaking and sharing of the bread is a symbol also of our Lord's crucifixion, a witness to his own body being broken on the tree of the cross.

Carefully made homemade wheat bread is particularly good for the Eucharist, for its visual reminder that God takes common earthly elements and human labor and uses them for his extraordinary purposes. Bread that crumbles easily should be avoided. When a whole loaf of bread is used, provision

should be made for cleaning the chancel after the service. Several sacramental bread recipes are provided later in this chapter.

Wine is used for the Holy Communion because that is what Christ used in the Upper Room and directed us to use when we celebrate his holy meal. In addition, wine is used because of its unique meaning. While Psalm 104 speaks of bread for strength, it speaks of wine for gladdening our hearts. Bread was a staple in ancient Jewish meals, but wine was used only for festive occasions. The purpose of wine was not to quench thirst, but to give joy and life. Thus, wine is not only the blood of Christ by its institution by him, it is also a sign of the festive and joyful nature of the eucharistic meal. Grape juice, which is artificial wine, is not appropriate for this sacramental feast.

The wine may be homemade, purchased commercially, or purchased from an ecclesiastical supplier. A fine dinner wine should be used, avoiding sweet port. Only wine made from grapes should be used. The wine may be white or red. Red, however, is more difficult to remove from linens.

The Credence and Offertory Table

The credence is a small shelf or table near the altar on which the eucharistic vessels and missal stand are kept prior to the offering. Many churches have two credences—one for the sacramental vessels and one for the offering plates and alms basins.

The offertory table is a small table near the rear of the nave where the bread and wine are placed until they are carried forward, along with the money offering, during the offertory.

Both the credence and offertory tables are covered with white linen cloths.

Setting the Table of the Lord

Preparation of the altar for the eucharistic feast should be done well ahead of the celebration. The first tasks are to be certain that the chancel and its furnishings are clean, that unnecessary items are removed, that the correct paraments are in

Holy Communion: Place and Preparation

The Holy Communion is the chief service of the church. It is known by many names, including the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Altar, and the Lord's Supper. By whatever name, this sacrament is the feast of the baptized family of God, gathered around the table of the Lord. In Holy Baptism we are initiated into God's family; in Holy Communion we are sustained in that family. In Holy Baptism we are made part of the priesthood of all believers; in Holy Communion we are nourished and strengthened to carry out our priesthood of witness and service in the world. In Holy Baptism we are joined to our Lord's death and resurrection; in Holy Communion we both proclaim his death and celebrate the feast of his victory.

The altar guild has a special and privileged responsibility to prepare for this celebration which is so central to Christian worship. It is important for guild members to grow continually in the meaning of the Eucharist, as well to be thoroughly familiar with the names and use of eucharistic vessels and linens.

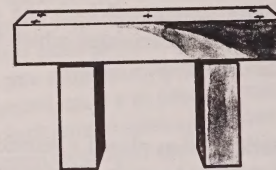
The Altar

The focal point of the worship space is the altar, the table of the Lord. More than any other furnishing, the altar symbolizes God's constant presence in his church. The altar is therefore the center of the church's life, both architecturally and liturgically.

The term altar is derived from the Latin word *alta*, which means high. The altar is usually on a raised platform known as a *predella*. Its height both enhances the dignity and the significance of the altar, and enables the assembled congregation to see the actions at the altar.

The altar is the table for the Holy Communion meal—the place where the eucharistic feast is celebrated and around which God's baptized family gathers to share this feast. In the early church the altar was free-standing, and the presiding minister faced the people for the eucharistic celebration. During later centuries when theology began to deteriorate, people were often considered unworthy to commune. The altar was moved against the east wall of the church, often far away from the congregation. The priest celebrated the Eucharist with his back to the people.

Luther and the Reformation helped restore the Holy Communion to the people, and finally we are again seeing altars placed in a free-standing position as tables. In this position, the ministers stand behind the altar for the Great Thanksgiving in the Holy Communion liturgy, facing the people in a more courteous, hospitable, and intimate relationship. The free-standing altar witnesses to the meal character and fellowship of the Eucharist.



The top of the altar is known as the *mensa*, which means table. The height of the *mensa* is thirty-nine inches, and it is usually rectangular or square. Five Greek crosses are inscribed into the top of the *mensa*, one at each corner and one in the center. The crosses represent the five wounds of our crucified Lord.

The *mensa* is used only as the table for the eucharistic feast.

Nothing is placed on it except altar linens, the missal stand, eucharistic vessels, and sometimes candles.

Altars which are not free-standing often have a retable, which is a small shelf above the back of the mensa. On the retable (which is sometimes also called a gradine) may be placed the altar cross, flower vases, and candles. Flower vases are not placed on the mensa itself.

Older churches often have a reredos, which is a high extension of the retable, made of carved wood or stone. When there is no reredos, an ornamental cloth known as a dossal is sometimes used as background for an altar which is not free-standing.

Altar Linens

Three linens are traditionally used to vest the altar, marking it as the table of the Lord. They are on the altar at all times, except that they are removed at the conclusion of the Maundy Thursday liturgy, and the altar remains bare on Good Friday.

Cerecloth

The first linen placed on the mensa (the top of the altar) is the cerecloth. When the altar is stone, the cerecloth is waxed or otherwise waterproofed to prevent dampness from staining the other linens and from damaging the various vessels. Otherwise it is simply a heavy linen and helps protect the mensa. The cerecloth measures the exact dimensions of the top of the mensa.

When the cerecloth is removed from the altar, it is rolled carefully in order to prevent wrinkles, which in a waxed fabric may be impossible to remove.

Protector Linen

Over the cerecloth is often placed a second linen, to which the altar parament(s) may be sewn. This protector linen is the same depth as the mensa and the same width as the parament.

Fair Linen

The fair linen is the most important of the altar linens, because it represents the burial linen or shroud in which our

Lord's body was wrapped after his crucifixion. The word *fair* refers to the fine quality and cleanliness of this linen. Thus, because of its symbolism and because it is very visible to the worshiping assembly, the fair linen should always be spotless and fresh. Each church will find it necessary to own at least two fair linens, so that one is always clean and ready to use. When laundered, the fair linen is never folded.

The fair linen is the same depth as the top of the mensa, but its length may vary, depending on the altar and its paraments. Often the fair linen extends over the ends of the mensa one-third or two-thirds the height of the altar, or it may be the same length as the mensa. Generous hems (as much as two inches) help the fair linen hang straight and lie flat.

Traditionally, five Greek crosses are embroidered in white on the fair linen—one in the center, and one near each corner of the mensa. The five crosses symbolize the five wounds of Christ.

It is not appropriate to place lace edges on the fair linen.

Sacramental Linens

Four additional linens are used for the celebration of the Holy Communion: the corporal, the pall, purificators, and the veil. These linens are carried in a burse.

Corporal

The corporal is a square of fine linen which is laid by an assisting minister on the center of the altar over the fair linen during the offertory. The eucharistic vessels are then set on the corporal. This linen is sometimes interpreted to symbolize the linen placed over the face of Christ for his burial. The corporal is one of the most ancient altar linens used for Christian worship.

Depending on the depth of the altar, the corporal is usually about twenty inches square. A small Greek cross is usually embroidered in white near the center front edge.

The corporal is folded and ironed inside out in thirds each way (forming nine squares), so that it can be unfolded on the

place, that all linens are freshly laundered and ironed, that all of the sacramental vessels are clean and polished, and that sufficient quantities of bread and wine are ready.

Most important in all of the preparatory work is that it be done with the reverence and good order that befit Christ's presence. Awareness of Christ's presence in the sacrament will ensure that the work is done with genuine joy and gratitude for God's grace. To prepare the Lord's table is an immense privilege!

There are various acceptable ways of arranging the vessels for the Eucharist. The method used in a given parish will be determined by the available chancel furnishings and vessels, by the pastor's preferences, and by a sense of good liturgical order.

In determining parish customs, the altar guild and the pastor must first ascertain the resources of the church. Is the credence to be used? Is the altar free-standing? Are burse and veil to be used? Is the paten a proper size to fit into the rim of the chalice? Is there an offertory procession? Is the pastor right- or left-handed? Are there assisting ministers? Answers to questions such as these will help in selecting a method for preparing the table of the Lord.

The chalice is often vested in the traditional manner. It is done in several steps:

1. A purificator folded in thirds lengthwise is placed over the mouth of the empty chalice, so that the right and left sides hang evenly over the edges of the chalice.
2. The paten is placed on top of the purificator. (If hosts rather than whole loaf are to be used, a large host may be placed on the paten.)
3. The paten is covered with the pall.



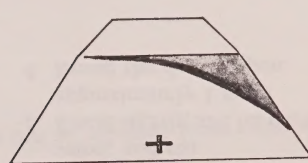
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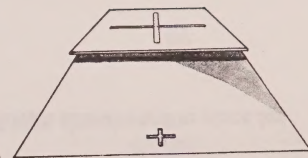
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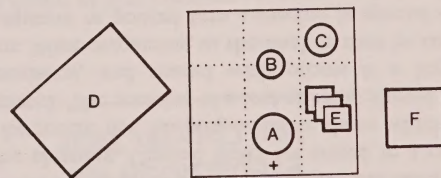


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4. The chalice veil in the proper color of the day is placed over the pall and arranged so that a trapezoid is seen when viewed from the front.
5. The corporal and additional purificators are placed in the burse, which matches the veil. The burse is laid on top of the vested chalice.

It is preferable for the vested chalice (as well as flagon and other vessels) to be kept on a credence until the offering, at which time an assisting minister carries it to the altar and sets the table. However, if there is no credence, the vested chalice may be set on the altar prior to the service.

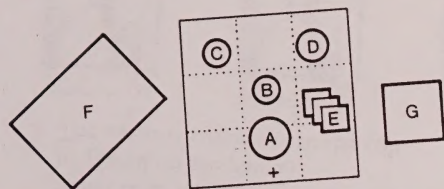
During the offering, the corporal is placed on the altar, and the vessels are set on the corporal. The following arrangement is appropriate when a whole loaf of bread is used:



A-Paten
B-Chalice
C-Flagon or Cruet

D-Missal Stand
E-Purificators
F-Burse

If hosts are used, the following arrangement may be employed:



- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| A-Paten | D-Flagon or Cruet |
| B-Chalice | E-Purificators |
| C-Ciborium or Host Box | F-Missal Stand |
| | G-Burse |

When additional chalices are needed for the service, they are brought to the altar and filled just before the distribution; only one chalice is on the altar for the Great Thanksgiving.

Other Preparations

Depending on local practices, the altar guild may have additional responsibilities in preparing for the Holy Communion.

In some congregations, Communion registration cards are placed in pew racks in order that a record can be kept of communicants. It is also important to be sure that sharpened pencils are in place.

In congregations where the common cup is not used, it is necessary for trays of individual glasses to be set out for distribution as communicants approach the altar. These glasses should never be prefilled, because that practice weakens the symbolism of our oneness in Christ and suggests an overly individualistic understanding of the sacrament.

When the elements are to be carried to the sick and home-bound following the congregational service (using the rite of Distribution of Communion to Those in Special Circum-

stances, *Occasional Services*, pp. 76-81), adequate bread and wine must be provided prior to the service. In addition, the vessels for carrying the elements and the purificators need to be prepared.

Following the Service

After the liturgy is concluded, all of the eucharistic vessels and linens are removed from the chancel and taken to the sacristy for cleaning. Unused hosts are stored in a cool and dry place for future use, keeping separate those which have been consecrated. The remains of a loaf of bread should be eaten by the ministers, and shared with others if a large amount remains. Wine remaining in the chalice may be consumed by the ministers or poured into a piscina (a special drain going directly into the ground) or onto the ground.

Vessels are washed in hot soapy water and dried with soft cloths. Once cleaned, they should be handled with soft, dry gloves or cloths in order to prevent marking them. If polishing is needed, see the instructions in chapter 5 or as provided by the manufacturer.

All sacramental linens should be laundered and ironed after each use. Instructions for cleaning and stain removal are provided in chapter 5.

Eucharistic Bread Recipes

Pita

Pita is a flat, round, hollow bread (sometimes referred to as "pocket bread") which is eaten extensively in biblical lands. It is good for sacramental use because of its size, shape, and ease in handling. The following recipe is from Israel, courtesy of Abraham Har.

1. Dissolve 2 packages of yeast in 1 cup of lukewarm water.
2. Add 1 teaspoon of salt and 2½ cups of white flour to the water, and stir.
3. Knead lightly, and let the dough rise in a warm place for approximately 1 hour.
4. Knead the dough again.

11

Preparation for the Church Year

The church year is a wonderful way in which we recall and celebrate the mighty acts of God. It is a reminder of God's constant activity—not only God's interventions into human history, but also his grace-filled activity among us now. Through the liturgical year we realize that we are a part of God's ongoing saving and loving activity.

For many centuries the church year calendar has shaped our worship: the readings, the sermons, the hymns and other music, the color of the paraments, and the appearance of worship space. Through a rich observance of the church year, each season and festival can make its fullest impact on the assembled congregation. The church is the grateful recipient and careful guardian of the liturgical year. Faithful observance of it is both a privilege and a responsibility. In its ministry of preparation, it is important for the altar guild to study the background and significance of the various liturgical seasons and festivals. Each day of the church year has its own unique character and message, determined by the appointed lessons for the day. Close attention to these lessons enables us to celebrate meaningfully the events in the life of our Lord and in church history.

The church year consists most basically of two parts. The

first half recalls and celebrates the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. This is the festival half of the year, and it in turn has two divisions. The Christmas cycle consists of the seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. During this time the church focuses on the prophecies and events surrounding the incarnation. The Easter cycle is composed of the seasons of Lent and Easter, from Ash Wednesday through the Day of Pentecost. During these weeks we prepare for and observe the events surrounding our Lord's passion, death, and resurrection, and his sending of the Holy Spirit.

The second half of the church year is a more ordinary, non-festival time. It is the season after Pentecost, known as the Time of the Church. This season begins with the Holy Trinity (First Sunday after Pentecost) and concludes with the festival of Christ the King (Last Sunday after Pentecost). During these weeks, the church concentrates on Christ's public ministry—his sermons, parables, and miracles. It is a time of growth in faith, hope, and love—and thus green paraments are used as a symbol of this growth.

Principal festivals of the church year are Easter Day, the Ascension of Our Lord, the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Trinity, Christmas Day, and the Epiphany of Our Lord. Interspersed throughout the year are lesser festivals, commemorations, days commemorating events in church history, and other occasions.

Advent

Advent consists of the four weeks before Christmas. The name of this first season of the liturgical year comes from a Latin word which means "coming." Advent focuses on this "coming" in three ways: Christ coming in the past as the baby at Bethlehem, Christ coming in the present in Word and Sacraments and in the fellowship of the church, and Christ coming again in the future at the end of time. In Advent we prepare for the celebration of Christ's coming in the incarnation, but more importantly we prepare for his second coming, when he will make all things new and judge the world in righteousness.

The preferred color for Advent is blue, the color of hope. The alternate color is purple, the royal color of the coming King. Blue, however, helps make apparent the differences between Advent and Lent.

One of the themes of Advent is darkness, and it is thus appropriate to use fewer candles during these four weeks. An Advent wreath may be hung or set near the altar. The wreath is a circle with four candles, and it may be covered with greens. The candles may all be white or blue, or perhaps purple if purple paraments are used. The earlier practice of using three purple candles and one pink candle no longer reflects our calendar and lectionary. On the First Sunday in Advent, the first candle is lighted during the Psalm following the First Lesson. On the Second Sunday in Advent, the first candle is lighted prior to the service, and the second candle is lighted during the Psalm. An additional candle is thus lighted during each Sunday in Advent until all four are lighted.

Advent is a time for visual restraint and simplicity. It is appropriate to omit altar flowers during these weeks of preparation, in order to provide a marked contrast with the festivity of Christmas. When there are no flowers, vases are removed from the chancel.

Advent should not be confused with Christmas. Christmas decorations, such as a Christmas tree, should not appear during Advent.

Christmas

Christmas is the festive celebration of the Nativity of our Lord, the Word made flesh. This celebration lasts for twelve days—from Christmas Eve through Epiphany Eve.

The liturgical color for Christmas is white, symbolizing the light and purity of Christ and our great joy at his birth. White is used for the twelve days of Christmas, except for the festivals of St. Stephen (December 26) and of the Holy Innocents (December 28), when red is used in observance of their martyrdom.

Greens and wreaths may be placed in the nave and narthex,

and the chancel may be adorned with abundant poinsettias. Plants, however, are never placed on the altar itself, nor should it be obstructed by decorations. If there is sufficient room, a Christmas tree (never artificial) may be set up. The tree may be bare or decorated with white lights and Chrismons. If lights are used, the tree should be made fireproof. Chrismons (taken from the word "Christ monograms") are symbols of Christ which may be made by the altar guild or other members of the parish. Decorations for Christmas should not be put up until after worship on the Fourth Sunday in Advent, because early decorating robs both Advent and Christmas of their full meaning.

Especially for Christmas Eve services, candles may be placed in windows of the nave and on the ends of pews as brilliant symbols of Christ, the Light of the world. If hand candles are distributed to worshipers, all fire safety precautions should be taken. For example, the altar guild should be certain that fire extinguishers are charged and readily accessible.

A Christmas creche may be placed near the altar, although it should not detract from the prominence of the altar itself. The figures may be carried in the entrance procession on Christmas Eve or Day and then placed in the creche. The figures of the magi should be reserved until Epiphany. During the season of Christmas, the magi may be placed on a window or table near the rear of the nave or in the narthex, as a reminder of their journey to Bethlehem and of the relationship between Christmas and Epiphany.

The altar guild needs to be prepared for large numbers of communicants at Christmas liturgies and should have adequate supplies of bread and wine on the offertory table or credence, and an ample number of purificators on the credence.

Epiphany

The Epiphany of our Lord is celebrated on January 6, marking the manifestation of Christ to the whole world. The coming of the magi to Bethlehem is reported in the gospel reading for this festival; this event may be made vivid by adding the figures of

the magi to the creche during the entrance procession. Figures of the shepherds and perhaps the animals may be removed in advance.

White is the appointed color for Epiphany, a reminder that it is a festival of light.

On Epiphany Eve or following the Epiphany Day liturgy, there may be a ceremony of the burning of the greens. This may take place in the church parking lot or another safe place. Municipal permission and/or fire protection may be necessary.

The Epiphany Season

The first and last Sundays after the Epiphany are festivals. The Second through the Eighth Sundays after the Epiphany use green paraments as a symbol of our growth in knowing Jesus as God's Son.

The Baptism of Our Lord

The First Sunday after the Epiphany is the Baptism of Our Lord, in observance of his Baptism by St. John the Baptist in the Jordan River and, in that event, Jesus' designation as the Son of God. Paraments for this day are white, since it is a festival of Christ. A baptismal festival may be held on this day (see chap. 6 regarding preparations for Holy Baptism).

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

The Transfiguration of Our Lord is celebrated on the Last Sunday after the Epiphany as a climax to the season and a prelude to Lent. Paraments for the Transfiguration are white.

Ash Wednesday

Since at least the seventh century, Ash Wednesday has been observed as the first day of Lent. The name is taken from the ancient tradition of placing ashes on the foreheads of penitents. In the biblical tradition, ashes represent God's condemnation of sin; human dependence on God for life; humiliation and repentance. Ashes are a reminder of death: "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

Ashes for the imposition are made from palms from the

previous year's observance of the Sunday of the Passion. The palms are cut into small pieces and burned with rubbing alcohol or solid fuel firestarters. After enough has been burned, work the ash through a fine wire mesh sieve. The ash may be mixed with a small amount of oil or water and placed in a small bowl or other container for the imposition. A lavabo bowl and towel will need to be provided for cleansing the minister's hands after the imposition of ashes.

Ash Wednesday, the most penitential day of the church year, may occur between February 4 and March 10.

Paraments for Ash Wednesday may be black (the color of ashes, humiliation, and mourning) or purple (the color of penitence).

Flowers are not appropriate on Ash Wednesday, and the empty vases should also be removed from the chancel. Other festive decorations, such as banners, are also removed. From Ash Wednesday through the Saturday of Holy Week, crosses, pictures, and statues may be veiled with unbleached linen or purple fabric, as a demonstration that Lent is a time for austerity and purification.

Holy Communion is celebrated on Ash Wednesday.

Lent

Lent is the forty-day season (not including Sundays) of preparation for Easter. Traditionally, Lent has two primary themes—Baptism and penitence—both as preparation for a worthy celebration of the paschal feast. Lent does not focus on our Lord's passion; that is the focus of Holy Week.

Paraments for Lent are purple, the color of penitence.

Flowers, being a symbol of joy, may be omitted during Lent in order to help the congregation absorb the penitential character of the season. Empty vases, of course, are always removed when not in use.

The Sunday of the Passion

The first day of Holy Week is the Sunday of the Passion, also known as Palm Sunday. The mood of this day, reflecting its double name, is a mixture of triumph and tragedy. We observe

both Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem as well as his death on the cross.

Paraments are scarlet, the dark red color of blood. The alternate color is purple, the penitential color of Lent. It is good to have scarlet, however, to help distinguish Holy Week from the remainder of Lent.

Palms may replace flowers in the chancel for this day.

The altar guild is usually responsible for obtaining and preparing a sufficient quantity of palm branches for this day's procession. Several palm branches should be saved and dried for making ashes for the following year's Ash Wednesday liturgy.

The presiding minister may wear a scarlet or purple cope during the entrance rite on the Sunday of the Passion.

Maundy Thursday

Maundy Thursday recalls the institution of the Eucharist during the Last Supper in the Upper Room. The name of the day is from the Latin word *mandatum*, which means command. It refers to Jesus' words at the Last Supper, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another."

Paraments for Maundy Thursday are scarlet or white. Altar flowers are appropriate and should coordinate with the color of the paraments.

Holy Communion is always celebrated on Maundy Thursday. If your parish usually uses hosts (wafers), Maundy Thursday is a day to consider using real bread in order to emphasize the meal character of this sacrament.

A foot-washing ceremony, emphasizing Jesus' servanthood, is an optional part of the Maundy Thursday liturgy. A basin, a pitcher of hot water (so that it is still warm by the time of the foot-washing), an apron, and lavabo bowl and towel for the presiding minister, and a chair and towel for each participant need to be prepared before the service.

Following the Maundy Thursday liturgy, the altar is stripped as a symbolic remembrance of Christ's humiliation by the soldiers. The altar guild may be asked to assist the presiding minister by carrying the eucharistic vessels, candles, ornaments,

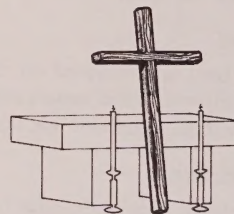
linens, paraments, and all other furnishings into the sacristy. The sacristy should be clean and ready for all of these items. During the stripping of the altar, a cantor or the choir sings Psalm 22 and/or 88. The chancel and altar remain bare until the Easter Vigil.

Maundy Thursday is the first day of the Triduum, the three days of intense observance of the paschal mystery. Beginning with Maundy Thursday evening, the Triduum concludes Easter Evening. It is the most sacred and important time of the entire church year.

Good Friday

The original name of this day was probably "God's Friday." It is a day to celebrate the sacrifice on the cross of Christ, our Passover Lamb. The altar is bare of all linens and other furnishings. It is preferable for paraments to be omitted on Good Friday, but if they are used, they should be scarlet or black. Flowers are not used on Good Friday.

It is not Lutheran custom to celebrate Holy Communion on Good Friday; this day's focus is the cross. The altar is not used at all during the Good Friday liturgy. Instead, the rite centers at one or more reading desks.



A large rough-hewn wooden cross may be prepared for the Good Friday Liturgy in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. It may be placed in the narthex in readiness for its procession near the conclusion of the liturgy, or it may be placed in front of the altar (leaning against the altar or the Communion rail, or placed in a stand). A tall, lighted candle may be placed on a floor stand on each side of the cross.

If the service of Tenebrae is used, the altar guild will need to prepare a triangular candelabrum known as the Tenebrae hearse. Candles are extinguished individually following the reading of each Psalm, representing humankind falling away

by Donna Schaper



God, I Cannot Call You Father



God, I cannot call you Father.
Sometimes I cannot even call you Mother.
And yet I know that you continue to call me daughter.

Words don't mean anything they say.
Learn to speak half a language
Learn to call God half a name.

But you, O God, rage with me.
My ears matter. Words matter to me.
And they matter to You as well.

You are gentle in the face of the insult.
In the face of half a name.
But I am not.

Father-God, Mother-God, teach us how to speak.
Forgive the idolatry.
Show us the way to your Name.

You throw in your lot with us.
You share with us the power to name.
You choose sometimes to break out of your parent.
To be brother or wind, fire or spirit.
To be hidden.
To be other than who we think You are.

She dwells among us.
He walks the road we walk.
She carries our burdens.
He liberates us.
And yet we don't even know Her.
We mistake Him for one half of us.

She did send a Man.
The man Jesus
The concrete human
Who must have gender.
The form of God.
When He chose to be more than parent.

But she stayed above
our captivity and his captivity
to concreteness.
She kept a bit of mystery.
He kept the wind at her disposal.
She saved the fire for his presence.

Beyond Mother and beyond Father,
Beyond even Parent.
O God, you live.
Willing to let us address you
Willing to let us call your name
And smiling, beyond your rage.

Hear us when we call.
Respond even when we name You
With your own names.
And name us, O God.
Call me daughter. Call me sister.
Call me a woman whom the spirit has known.

Give me the concreteness you gave your Son.
Honor my partialness.
And reveal, again and again, your mystery.

Donna Schaper is associate chaplain at Yale University.



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To be brother or wind, fire or spirit.
To be hidden.
To be other than who we think You are.

She dwells among us.
He walks the road we walk.
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lievers must some day in the presence of Christ give an account of their use of the gifts imparted by His Spirit.

To possess a gift is to be responsible for the use and the development of that God-given ability for the glory of Christ and the edification of His church. Peter said,

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. (1 Pet. 4:10)

The Stewardship of Gifts

Gifts are designed for ministry. Peter's use of the term *steward* associates the appropriate use of gifts with the role of the servant. Arndt and Gingrich translate the Greek word *kaloï oikonomoi* as

"good administrators of the varied grace of God."¹

The steward was a manager or administrator usually of his master's property. As a servant he exercised all the ability he could muster to make his master's investment profitable. The investment of Christ in the believer is the ability to minister for the good of others. To waste that gift is a loss to the believer, to others, and to God.

Gifts and Leadership

The gifts are not only related to ministry in the New Testament scriptures, they are also related to leadership in the church. The leader Christ calls He also equips with gifts appropriate to his responsibility. It is remarkable how many of the gifts are by their very nature intended for leadership. This concept is especially obvious in Eph. 4:11-12:

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.

In the above passage Paul names five functions of ministry necessary to the church's welfare. He is more concerned with the people who minister than with their particular gifts. The gifted officers enumerated here are a special gift of Christ to His church.

The apostle Paul evidently saw a close relationship between leadership and gifts. Another passage in his epistles relating to this subject is 1 Cor. 12:28-30:

And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.

All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they?

All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?

In listing the divine appointments for leadership the Apostle mixes the offices with the gifts. He moves from talking about persons, apostles, prophets, and teachers to the abstract term *miracles* as though they were related items in a sequence. He meant by that abstract term those who do miracles. The implication of this sequence is that all who have an office have a gift. It is the responsibility of the assembly to select men to office which possess a gift corresponding to that office. The contemporary church tends to select men to office without regard to their gifts. The inevitable result of such an unscriptural procedure is poor leadership contributing to the progressive decline of the church. Effective ministry must be in the power of the Holy Spirit. The leadership of Christ's church is gifted by the Spirit to assure spiritual ministry to the body.

Necessary Credentials for Leadership

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to equip leaders for their ministry to the church. Enabling for Christian service is divine. Natural talents, attractive personality, wide experience, and a good education may do much to enrich a person's life, but none of these qualities fit a man to serve Christ. The natural man

makes his judgments of character on the outward appearance, but this method will not suffice in the selection of Christian leadership.

The church needs from its leaders sound teaching, wisdom, protection, guidance, direction and good order. The abilities to service these needs come from the Holy Spirit. Pastor-elders, lay-elders, and deacons must have gifts to minister to the body as Christ intends they should. The gifts given to leaders are for the purpose of equipping every believer for service. If gifts are neglected at the leadership level, the possibility of the gifts of all the members coming into use is very unlikely.

Safeguards to the purity and vitality of the church have been built into the divine order of the church administration and ministry. Positions of leadership have their own peculiar kinds of temptation. Pride and the abuse of authority are the most insidious and those which most frequently occur. Honoring the New Testament principle of gifts is one means of overcoming these temptations. Dr. A. B. Simpson grasped this truth in Paul's discussion of the order of gifts.

"The order of spiritual gifts is very instructive and also humiliating. The first mentioned gifts are those of the apostles, prophets and teachers, the spiritual ministries of the church. Next comes the miraculous gifts of healing subordinate to spiritual ministry—important but not preeminent. Thirdly comes the helps, people that just fit in, and by love, fellowship and prayer and often subordinate service, fill up the innumerable places and become the countless links without which all else would be in vain. After these in a lower order, come the governments, the rulers, the people with authority, wisely placed near the bottom to keep them from falling over with the weight of importance. No one can rule another until he has walked in the ranks and learned to keep his head low."²

Though the function of administration is fraught with dangers of spiritual pride, lording it over the flock, and self-aggrandizement it is nevertheless essential to the wellbeing of the church. It is so essential that the Holy Spirit distributes gifts for the purpose of effective administration. Mention is made in

1 Cor. 12:30 of the gift of "governments" or as the newer versions put it "administrations." The Greek word *kubernasis* comes from a verb form meaning "to steer." It is a nautical term and could be translated "shipmaster" or "helmsman." It refers to one who steers a ship. Kittle says of this word,

"The reference can only be to the specific gifts which qualify a Christian to be a helmsman to his congregation, i.e., a true director of its order and therewith of its life."

"... No society can exist without some order and directions. It is the grace of God to give gifts which equip for government."³

The principles of management have become an important field of study in modern terms. The size and complexity of business, institutions, and government require very competent and sophisticated administration. The New Testament teaches that the expertise to manage the house of God is on an entirely different basis. Divine management is a charisma given by the Holy Spirit to those called to leadership.

The pastor and the elders are under mandate to give order to the life and activities of the church. God has called the pastor in particular to be a helmsman of the ship of Zion, the church. More than one administrator is needed in a congregation. The pastor should have the ability to oversee the work and to coordinate the efforts of all who display this gift. Lay-elders as well as pastors may have the gift of administration. The church is sailing through troubled waters at this point in history and desperately needs men at the helm that lead with certainty and confidence.

The second gift related to church government is found in Romans 12:8:

... *he who leads with diligence* ...

The Greek word *proistamenos* literally means to be placed in the front of the line. The King James Version translates it "rule." It is the gift of ruling in the sense of leading the congregation. Kittle finds a deeper meaning in the context of this word.

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Palms may replace flowers in the chancel for this day.

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The presiding minister may wear a scarlet or purple cope during the entrance rite on the Sunday of the Passion.

Maundy Thursday

Maundy Thursday recalls the institution of the Eucharist during the Last Supper in the Upper Room. The name of the day is from the Latin word *mandatum*, which means command. It refers to Jesus' words at the Last Supper, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another."

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A foot-washing ceremony, emphasizing Jesus' servanthood, is an optional part of the Maundy Thursday liturgy. A basin, a pitcher of hot water (so that it is still warm by the time of the foot-washing), an apron, and lavabo bowl and towel for the presiding minister, and a chair and towel for each participant need to be prepared before the service.

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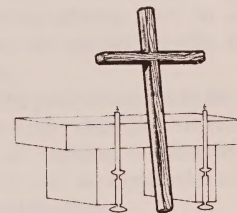
linens, paraments, and all other furnishings into the sacristy. The sacristy should be clean and ready for all of these items. During the stripping of the altar, a cantor or the choir sings Psalm 22 and/or 88. The chancel and altar remain bare until the Easter Vigil.

Maundy Thursday is the first day of the Triduum, the three days of intense observance of the paschal mystery. Beginning with Maundy Thursday evening, the Triduum concludes Easter Evening. It is the most sacred and important time of the entire church year.

Good Friday

The original name of this day was probably "God's Friday." It is a day to celebrate the sacrifice on the cross of Christ, our Passover Lamb. The altar is bare of all linens and other furnishings. It is preferable for paraments to be omitted on Good Friday, but if they are used, they should be scarlet or black. Flowers are not used on Good Friday.

It is not Lutheran custom to celebrate Holy Communion on Good Friday; this day's focus is the cross. The altar is not used at all during the Good Friday liturgy. Instead, the rite centers at one or more reading desks.



A large rough-hewn wooden cross may be prepared for the Good Friday Liturgy in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. It may be placed in the narthex in readiness for its procession near the conclusion of the liturgy, or it may be placed in front of the altar (leaning against the altar or the Communion rail, or placed in a

stand). A tall, lighted candle may be placed on a floor stand on each side of the cross.

If the service of Tenebrae is used, the altar guild will need to prepare a triangular candelabrum known as the Tenebrae hearse. Candles are extinguished individually following the reading of each Psalm, representing humankind falling away

from Christ. The paschal candle is not used in *Tenebrae*; it is reserved for Easter itself.

The Vigil of Easter

* The Easter Vigil is the most dramatic liturgy of the year, the climax of all of our spiritual preparations during Lent and Holy Week. It is a liturgy filled with contrasts between light and darkness, freedom and bondage, life and death. The Easter Vigil liturgy consists of four parts: the Service of Light, the Service of Readings, the Service of Holy Baptism, and the Service of Holy Communion.

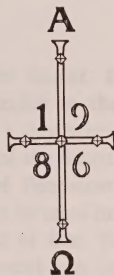
Easter preparations are made with white or gold paraments and flowers. Linens and ornaments that had been removed on Maundy Thursday are now replaced.

The paschal candle leads the Easter Vigil procession, and its stand should be placed in readiness near the center approach to the altar. A new paschal candle is normally acquired each year for this service. A cross, the Greek letters *alpha* and *omega*, and numerals of the current year are inscribed on the candle before the service. Traditionally the presiding minister, while doing so, says the words "Christ yesterday and today [cross]; the beginning and the end [*alpha* and *omega*]; his are all times [1] and all ages [9]; to him be glory and dominion [8], through all the ages of eternity [6]. Amen." Grains of incense are placed in readiness near the candle stand, for insertion during the Easter Proclamation.

A large fire may be built in a brazier or on the ground outside the church building, in preparation for the lighting of the paschal candle. If such a fire is not feasible, it may be struck from flint and steel.

Four to twelve biblical readings are used in the Vigil, and they should be marked in the Bible for the convenience of the lectors.

The usual preparations are made for Holy Baptism (see chap. 6). Even if Holy Baptism is not actually celebrated at the Easter



Vigil, the renewal of baptismal vows will occur, and the font should be filled with water, or a filled ewer may be placed near the font. An evergreen bough for sprinkling may be placed near the font for use during the renewal of baptismal vows.

The usual preparations are made for the Eucharist (see chap. 7). Consider using a loaf of raised bread as a symbolic reminder of our Lord's resurrection.

Easter

The festival of the Resurrection of Our Lord is the queen of all Christian festivals, and all preparations for its celebration should make its significance apparent. All of the furnishings and appointments should be thoroughly cleaned and polished. The best linens should be used, and they should be spotlessly white and newly ironed. Gold paraments may be used on Easter Day; white paraments are used during the rest of the Easter season. All paraments and vestments should be cleaned and ironed in preparation for the Easter celebration.

White or gold flowers are appropriate, and abundant Easter lilies and other flowers (including tulips, daffodils, and blooming azaleas) may be used to adorn the chancel. Flowers and plants, however, are never placed on the altar itself. All decorations should serve to direct worshippers' attention to the altar, the paschal candle, the font, and the pulpit or reading desk.

The paschal candle in its floor stand is placed near the gospel side of the altar (the left side as one faces the altar). It is lighted for all worship services from Easter Eve through the Day of Pentecost, as a reminder of the unity of these great fifty days of celebration.

The Eucharist should never be excluded from any Easter liturgy, since Easter is the paschal feast. The altar guild will need to prepare for large numbers of communicants, having adequate supplies of bread, wine, and purificators ready for use. (See chap. 7.)

Easter Day occurs between March 22 and April 25. The Easter celebration lasts for fifty days, and it is helpful to have

abundant flowers throughout the season (replacing them with fresh flowers as necessary, of course).

The Ascension of Our Lord

The festival of the Ascension is forty days after Easter, and it celebrates Christ's triumphant ascension from the Mount of Olives to heaven.

White paraments are used, and white flowers are fitting.

The paschal candle may be extinguished at the reading of the gospel on Ascension Day. However, it is better to allow the candle to burn through the Day of Pentecost. Regardless of when it is extinguished, it is moved after that service to its place near the font (where it is lighted only on days when Holy Baptism is celebrated).

The Day of Pentecost

The Day of Pentecost occurs fifty days after Easter. It celebrates the time when the Holy Spirit descended to the believers gathered in Jerusalem. It is, therefore, a day when decorations and ceremonies should be reminders of the Spirit.

Bright red paraments are used on the Day of Pentecost, reminders of the fire of the Spirit. Red gladioli may be used for altar flowers, since their shape suggests tongues of fire. To emphasize the importance of this festival, the chancel may be adorned with red geraniums or other red flowers. They should be arranged to call attention to the altar, although plants and flowers are never placed on the mensa of the altar. Following Pentecost worship services, the geraniums may be planted on the church grounds.

Pentecost is an appropriate day for full and festive processions, and banners may be made in preparation for the procession. Bells may be attached to the banners to add a joyous note to the day. The presiding minister may wear a red cope for the Pentecost procession.

Holy Communion is normally celebrated on this festival, and the altar guild will make the usual preparations. (See chap. 7.)

Since the Day of Pentecost is an appropriate time for Holy Baptism as well as for Affirmation of Baptism (Confirmation), the altar guild should seek advance instructions from the pastor. (See chap. 6 regarding Baptism, and chap. 9 regarding Confirmation preparations.)

The Season after Pentecost

Except for festivals, Sundays after Pentecost use green paraments as a reminder that this is a season of spiritual growth.

The Holy Trinity

This festival occurs on the First Sunday after Pentecost, and it celebrates the doctrine of the Trinity, one God in three persons. Paraments are white.

Reformation Day

Reformation Day occurs on October 31, but it may be observed on the Sunday preceding that date. It is a day for giving thanks for Martin Luther and the other reformers, but it also calls attention to the ongoing need for renewal of the church. Paraments are bright red.

All Saints' Day

This festival commemorates all the baptized people of God who have died in the faith. All Saints' Day is November 1, but it may be observed on the Sunday following that date. The liturgical color is white.

Thanksgiving

Although it is a civil rather than a religious holiday, it has become common for churches to hold worship services on Thanksgiving Eve or Day. The liturgical color is white. Restrained decorations of the fruits of the earth—such as grapes, sheaves of grain, ears or stalks of corn—are appropriate, but should not draw attention away from the altar.

Since the word Eucharist comes from the Greek word for thanksgiving, it is fitting to celebrate Holy Communion at

Thanksgiving. Real bread rather than wafers may be used, as a reminder that God uses the fruits of the earth for God's gracious purposes.

• *Christ the King*

The last Sunday after Pentecost celebrates the kingship of Christ and is so named. The liturgical color is white.

12

Organization

To be effective servants of the liturgy, an altar guild needs to be organized in a way that facilitates its work. Criteria for membership and principles of organization are established by the pastor and the parish worship committee, and are approved by the church council. A sample constitution is included in appendix B of this book.

Membership

An important qualification for all members of the altar guild is a sense of awe in the presence of the Holy God. This awe gives rise to the spirit of reverence that is so essential to the altar guild's work. The ministry of liturgical preparations is a high privilege for a Christian, and dedicated altar guild members will carry out their responsibilities with awe, joy, gratitude, and love for their Lord. Tasks of the altar guild are not a burden but a delight, not a duty but a high privilege. There is no room in the altar guild for complaining or grumbling. If the work cannot be done with joy and a sense of privilege, a replacement should be sought.

Another important characteristic is humility. While it is necessary for altar guild members to be skilled in various ways, each member is only one among many servants of the liturgy. The privilege of serving God is shared with other altar guild

coloring in the Song of Songs recalls the primeval man leaving his father and his mother to cleave to his wife (Gen. 2:24; cf. Gen. 24:28; Ruth 1:8).

Like Genesis 2, Canticles affirms mutuality of the sexes. There is no male dominance, no female subordination and no stereotyping of either sex. The woman is independent, fully the equal of the man. Her interests, work and words defy the connotations of "second sex." Unlike the first woman, this one is not a wife. Her love does not include procreation. At times the man approaches her, and at other times she initiates their meetings (3:1-4). Each lover exalts the physical beauty and charm of the other in language candid and covert. Their metaphorical speech reveals even as it conceals. They treat each other with tenderness and respect, for they are sexual lovers, not sexual objects. They neither exploit nor escape sex; they embrace and enjoy it. Both are naked, and they are not ashamed (cf. Gen. 2:25).

On occasion the woman expresses their relationship by the formula, "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (2:16; 6:3). Once she says, "I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me" (7:10). The word "desire" occurs only three times in the Old Testament: once in Canticles and twice in the Yahwist Epic (Gen. 3:16; 4:7). "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" is the divine judgment upon the woman. As we have seen, its context is sin and perversion. Desire in the Song of Songs reverses this meaning of the male-female relationship. Here desire is joy, not judgment. Moreover, the possessive reference has switched from the wife's desire for her husband to the desire of the male lover for the female. Has one mark of sin in Eden been overcome here in another garden with the recovery of mutuality in love? Male dominance is totally alien to Canticles. Can it be that grace is present?

Let us stress that these lovers are not the primeval couple living before the advent of disobedience. Nor are they an eschatological couple. They live in the "terror of history" (Eliade), but their love knows not that terror. If death did not swallow the primeval couple, neither does it overpower the historical couple. "Love is strong as death" (8:6). The poetry speaks triumphantly to all terror when it affirms that not even the primeval waters of chaos can destroy love:

*Many waters cannot quench love (ahabah),
neither can floods drown it (8:7).*

In many ways, then, Song of Songs is a midrash on Genesis 2-3. By variations and reversals it creatively actualizes major motifs and themes of the primeval myth. Female and male are born to mutuality and love. They are naked without shame; they are equal without duplication. They live in gardens

where nature joins in celebrating their oneness. Neither couple fits the rhetoric of a male-dominated culture. As equals they confront life and death. But the first couple lose their oneness through disobedience. Consequently, the woman's desire becomes the man's dominion. The second couple affirm their oneness through eroticism. Consequently, the man's desire becomes the woman's delight. Whatever else it may be, Canticles is a commentary on Genesis 2-3. Paradise Lost is Paradise Regained.

Yet the midrash is incomplete. Even though Song of Songs is the poetry of history, it speaks not at all of sin and disobedience. Life knows no prohibitions. And, most strikingly, no Deity acts in that history. God is not explicitly acknowledged as either present or absent (though eroticism itself may be worship in the context of grace). Some may conclude that these omissions make the setting of Canticles a more desirable paradise than Eden. But the silences portend the limits. If we cannot return to the primeval garden (Gen. 3:23-24), we cannot live solely in the garden of eroticism. Juxtaposing the two passages, we can appropriate both for our present concern.

Suffice it to conclude that the Hebrew Scriptures and the Women's Liberation Movement do meet and that their encounter need not be hostile. Alongside Genesis 2-3 and the Song of Songs we place the themes of the nature of Yahweh, of the Exodus and of corporate personality. In various ways these themes and passages demonstrate a depatriarchalizing principle in the Hebrew Bible. Depatriarchalizing is not an operation that the exegete performs on the text. It is a hermeneutic operating within Scripture itself. We expose it; we do not impose it.

Tradition history teaches that the meaning and function of biblical materials is fluid. As Scripture moves through history, it is appropriated for new settings. Varied and diverse traditions appear, disappear and reappear from occasion to occasion. We shall be unfaithful readers if we neglect biblical passages that break with patriarchy or if we permit our interpretations to freeze in a patriarchal box of our own construction. For our day we need to perceive the depatriarchalizing principle, to recover it in those texts and themes where it is present and to accent it in our translations. Therein we shall be explorers who embrace both old and new in the pilgrimage of faith. □



will also serve the practicing preacher whose background in homiletics is spotty or out-of-date, or whose preaching needs strengthening in some specific area.

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I. WHAT IS LIBERATION THEOLOGY?

The North American theological scene has a tendency to latch on to key words and phrases, as if their use were proof that one is up to date. A few years ago it was "secularity." Later it was the "death of God." Today it is "liberation." Preachers of all shades of opinion speak of liberation. Every ecclesiastical assembly seems to feel compelled to include it in its pronouncements. It would seem that one cannot go wrong as long as one is for "liberation."

But words, like coins, lose their sharpness when they are overused. At that point, all sorts of counterfeits are possible. This became clear when the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America was preparing for the Bishops' Conference which took place in Puebla in 1979. At that point, many of the most belligerent opponents of liberation theology employed the strategy of coopting the term "liberation" and interpreting it in their own conservative fashion.¹ Therefore, before we proceed to deal with the subject of liberation preaching, we must clarify what is meant in this context by "liberation theology."

POWER AND POWERLESSNESS: A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE

When we speak here of "liberation theology," we are referring to theology done from the perspective of those who have been traditionally powerless in society and voiceless in the church. In the United States, this means blacks, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and



others. In Latin America, Asia, and Africa, it means those who have long been the subjects of colonialism, economic and political as well as ecclesiastical. In societies which worship youth, it means the aged. All over the world, it means women.

There is a growing number of people in these groups who have rejected the self-image imposed on them. If one takes as an example the case of international colonialism, it has been shown that the colonizers need to justify their enterprise by developing a theory of their cultural superiority, and selling that view to the colonized. For a while, overwhelmed by the power of the colonizers, generations of the colonized may believe what they are told about themselves—their lack of responsibility and organizational skills, their emotionalism, their lack of cultural creativity, etc. But eventually, through a process which takes different shapes in various situations, they come to the realization that they do not have to accept the self-image which has been imposed on them by the colonizers.² This process, which has spelled the death of the international colonial empires of the nineteenth century, is also taking place in societies such as ours among those who have been those societies' internal colonies—blacks, chicanos, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and women. It is on the toil of such people, and of the colonized overseas, that the great wealth of the North Atlantic has been built. And yet those people receive the smallest share of that wealth. Therefore, the change in self-image on their part is not a purely psychological or internal matter, but one which demands basic structural changes in the ordering of our society.

Not all people who have come to this awareness belong to the church. Many have left it because they perceive it as part of the structure of oppression against which they must rebel. And we must admit that such a view is amply justified, when we remember how Christianity was used to take land from Native Americans and then from Mexicans, how it justified slavery, how few Christian leaders protested against the internment of Japanese Americans during the Second World War, and how the Bible has been used to keep women in a subservient role. At the same time, there are many members of these groups who, out of their Christian faith, refuse to join the movement toward a new self-image or to demand their

rights. Many have been taught that it is unchristian to rock the boat or that if they are humble here on earth they will be rewarded in heaven or that they should be content to be of service to others and not claim positions of leadership.

Therefore, not all those who are involved in the various liberation movements can be called liberation *theologians*, for many have rejected all Christian theology as oppressive. Likewise, not all members of these groups who do theology can be called *liberation theologians*, for many simply repeat and reflect what they have been taught by others.

Liberation theology is that done from the perspective of the traditionally powerless as they experience the empowerment of the gospel, not only in an inner sense, but also in the sense that it compels and enables them to strive for justice. In rejecting the traditional interpretation of the Christian message, they refuse to leave the gospel in the hands of the powerful, to be used for their purposes, and insist that a proper interpretation of Scripture is freeing rather than oppressive.

This is not to say that the powerful have deliberately set out to interpret the Bible in an oppressive way. The truth is much more subtle than that. What actually takes place is an unconscious process through which the values, goals, and interests of those in power are read into Scripture.

Take for instance what happened in the early centuries of the Christian church. At first, most Christians belonged to the lower classes. Their opponents said that they were uncouth and unlearned, and that their teaching made no sense. A great deal of the Christian literature of the first four centuries seeks to respond to that challenge by showing that Christianity agrees with the best of Greek philosophy and Roman law. As an effort to communicate the gospel to those outside the church, this response is quite understandable. But what eventually took place was that Christians themselves began to think that Greek philosophy and Roman law spoke a clearer word about God and the divine purposes than did the Bible itself. By the time Constantine came to power, in the early fourth century, and he and his successors embraced Christianity, it was possible to do so without rejecting many of the values of the "best" Graeco-Roman society.

The conversion of Constantine, and the support which most of his successors gave to the church, accelerated the process. Eusebius of Caesarea wrote a *Church History* which made it appear that the only reasons why the empire had persecuted the church were grave misunderstandings and the maliciousness of some rulers—when in fact many of those who led the worst persecutions were among the ablest statesmen and most just rulers who ever governed the empire. The book of Revelation, which spoke of Rome in rather uncomplimentary fashion, was shunned, and Eusebius himself had doubts about its inclusion in the canon of the New Testament.³ The ritual of Christian worship began to imitate the formalities of the imperial court, with all their distinctions between various levels in the civil hierarchy. Christ was depicted as sitting on a heavenly throne, in a posture which resembled that of the emperors on their thrones. Even the cross was often studded with precious gems. Anything to obscure the fact that the One whom the church worshiped was a poor carpenter from Galilee, who had been condemned to death as an outlaw by Roman authorities.

Again, this was not a conscious process. Indeed, when one reads the documents of the time one comes across repeated protestations that what is being taught and done in the church is exactly what the apostles taught and did. The "faith of the fathers" became the watchword of orthodoxy. But the "fathers" were for the most part seen as bishops who sat on thrones, very much like the Emperor in Constantinople and the images of Christ in heaven.

There were protests against this. The Donatists broke away from the church and eventually were put down by sheer military force. At another level, the development of monasticism was also a sort of protest. Since the church had embraced the values of the surrounding society, these women and men (in Egypt there seem to have been twice as many female monastics as there were male) felt that the best way for them to reject those values was to live in seclusion, preferably in the desert. This feeling was so widespread that soon travelers said that the desert was as populated as a city. Others, while embracing the monastic attitude toward the prevailing values of society, continued their active involvement in the life of the church and often collided with the powerful. These were the great

saints of the fourth and fifth centuries: Athanasius, Ambrose, Jerome, Macrina, Basil, John Chrysostom, etc. Many of these we shall have occasion to quote later on, when we deal with the resources for liberation preaching from the early Christian tradition.

The usually unconscious process of adapting Christian teaching to the views and interests of the powerful did not end with Constantine and his successors. It has continued, for instance, in the manner in which the oppression and persecution of Jews has received religious and theological sanction. In the history of the Western Hemisphere it has appeared again and again in the taking of the land from its original inhabitants, in the destruction of ancient civilizations, in the annexation of Mexican territories by the U.S., in black slavery on both continents, etc., etc.

This oppressive use of supposedly Christian doctrine has repeatedly been pointed out. However, what we often fail to realize is that most of the people who did this were sincere in their beliefs. It is not that they consciously decided to interpret the Bible in such a way that it supported exploitation. It is rather that, from their perspective, a different interpretation was highly unlikely. And, since their views were reflected in the centers of authority within the church, their interpretation became normative and was passed on as authoritative, not only to later generations among the powerful, but also to the powerless, who were left with the alternative of either acquiescing to exploitation or rejecting Christianity.

What is happening with the birth of liberation theologies is that many among the traditionally powerless are asking the basic question of whether or not the manner in which the Bible has been interpreted by the powerful is accurate. This is the "ideological suspicion" of which we shall have much more to say later on. Could it not be that a biblical interpretation, so to speak, "from below" would uncover dimensions of the biblical message that have often been ignored?

THE MAIN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Many have argued that an interpretation of the Bible done by the powerless would be no less biased and determined by self-interest

than is the current one done by the powerful. Why trade one such interpretation for another? Nothing would really be gained. The response of liberation theologians is clear at this point and needs to be understood before any real progress can be made in the appreciation of liberation theology for preaching. It has to do with the perspective of the Bible itself.

If the major portion of the Bible is written by those who, in their own social situation, are the powerless and oppressed, if it is their perspective on the activity of God that is given us by Scripture, then surely a more accurate interpretation of the biblical word can be gained by those who currently stand in a parallel place in our own societies than by those who are powerful. This response needs to be looked at in some detail.

First of all, is it true that most of the Bible is written from the perspective of the powerless? Surely this is the case. The people of Israel begin their organized life as a band of runaway slaves, escaping the oppression of Pharaoh. Even the Promised Land they finally attain is an insecure piece of geography, at the crossroads of trade routes and constantly a battleground for the mighty empires that surround Israel. The only times Israel has a semblance of independent national life is in brief periods when these empires—Egypt to the west, or whatever is the current name of the peoples to the northeast in the great Mesopotamian and Persian area, and finally Macedonia, Syria, and Rome—are in disarray internally and cannot exercise their usual demand for tribute or subservience.

Almost perversely, God chose a people weak and small in number in preference to the mighty nations of the earth (Deut. 7:7). Part of the reason for this is that Israel could then be clear that the power is God's power, and not Israel's own strength (Deut. 8:1-20). In grateful response to God, Israel ought then to be obedient to God's will as expressed in the law. Relying on her own strength, which was tempting whenever the nation seemed to be strong and independent, inevitably brought about faithlessness and disobedience, which God then punished and cured by removing Israel's apparent power.

The slaves escaping from Egypt surely had a different perspective on God's activity and character than did their Egyptian pursuers. The kings of Israel often forgot the Law when the nation was strong

and prosperous. Even mighty David was rebuked by Nathan the prophet (II Sam. 12:1-15). David's greatness was seen in his response to the rebuke, in his hearing of the Word of God to him from the prophet. Other kings did not listen so well. King Jeroboam much preferred to listen to his own court priests who told him what he wished to hear than to Amos, the rough shepherd from out of town, who brought God's authentic word to him (Amos 7:10-17).

This is the pattern throughout much of the Old Testament. The powerful nations are overthrown by small Israel when Israel is obedient. The powerful within Israel are rebuked by the seemingly powerless prophets. What is astonishing is that the Old Testament records all of this. The Old Testament is not only our sacred Scripture. It is also a national history. Such histories normally glorify the nation. All difficulties are due to evil enemies, never to sinfulness within the nation itself. National heroes are models of perfection and their weaknesses overlooked. That is the general plan of secular national histories. But the Old Testament is quite different, and in this difference is seen the revelation of God. The official records are included, but the minority report of the prophets is even more in evidence. What has been preserved by Israel is the perspective of the powerless over against the viewpoint of the powerful. Included also are the repentant powerful who have learned through their own bitter experience that God is the defender of the poor and oppressed and not the supporter of the unjust, whether they be kings or nations.

Yet this does not mean that God prefers those who maintain a low opinion of themselves. Too often humility has been interpreted in this manner. Rather, God seems to choose those who have been made to feel like outcasts, those who are powerless and marginal, and then gives them a new sense of self-worth. God vindicates them in the eyes of their former oppressors. This theme of vindication of the powerless is a constant one in the Old Testament (see especially I Sam. 2:1-10). It is to be contrasted with the sinful arrogance of the powerful who believe themselves secure in their own strength (see Ps. 73). Humility and weakness alone are not enough for faithfulness. In the Old Testament, faithful humility is combined in the powerless with the belief that God will indeed be their strength

and that they can therefore hold their heads up very high, especially in the face of their oppressors.

In the New Testament, we are not dealing with a national history, but rather with that of an emerging institution. Yet the same pattern continues. Those who hear the gospel gladly are by and large not the powerful within the society of Israel. Rather, they are the fisherfolk, the women, the poor, and those who are marginalized because of their occupations: the tax collectors and the harlots.

The early church, as it moved into Gentile circles, continued to attract those who were unimportant and even powerless, rather than the elite among the Greeks (I Cor. 1:26-31). Yet there were some exceptions. Within Judaism, and within the New Testament, Paul is the major one who comes from the situation of the powerful. He was clearly among the educated and respected within Judaism (Phil. 3:4-6). We know also that Paul was a Roman citizen, which gave him status within the empire itself. Paul can be classified among the "repentant powerful," rather like King David. For him, believing in this "nobody" Jesus meant joining a group that was totally unlike his own insecure social position. He joined by deciding that the future lay with this marginal group and not with the trimmings of prestige and power to which he had been accustomed (Phil. 3:7-9).

Simon Magus is another example of a powerful person who becomes a Christian. But it takes the fisherman, Simon Peter, to make clear to him that his understanding of the faith is very faulty. Simon Magus evidently then repents and hears the gospel authentically (Acts 8:9-24), but the New Testament does not give us any glimpse into his life after this encounter, such as we are given into the life of Paul.

The New Testament, just as the Old, shows the people of God with all of their faults. We are not presented with an ideal group of perfect people. It is precisely the weakness of the people that allows the surpassing power of God to be seen. And when the people are faithful to such a God, these weak ones are filled with a power that astonishes even the powerful outside the church.

The supreme example of this is, of course, Jesus himself. In terms of worldly power and prestige, surely he was an outsider. Born in a

stable while his parents were being moved around by an alien government; the child of poor parents, he grew up in an obscure village where the mighty need not pay any attention to him! And yet, in this One, God was incarnate. It would have made more sense for the divine incarnation to be in the form of a king or a priest, or at least one of the elite of Jerusalem. Yet God the Son chose the form of a servant (Phil. 2:6-8), one of the powerless ones, even as God had chosen Israel, a weak nation. The cross shows the culmination of such a life, with all of its weakness and marginality. The resurrection shows the vindication by God in the most radical form.

God has a proclivity for speaking the word through the powerless. The whole Bible bears witness to this. Is this an accident, or is it an essential element of the gospel itself? Is there something about God's word that can best be heard and spoken by the powerless? Liberation theology would say there is indeed. And in this it is supported by the words of Jesus: "I thank thee, Father, . . . that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes" (Luke 10:21). The powerful have a difficult time hearing God accurately. Their choice seems to be hearing God's word to them through some apparently powerless person—Nathan, Amos, Simon Peter, Jesus—or not hearing it at all. Such theology would say also that in our own day, this pattern continues. The powerless have readier access to an authentic understanding of the gospel than do the powerful. The powerful need to hear the word through voices they have rejected in their own society. Liberation theology is an understanding of the gospel arising precisely in the midst of such traditionally rejected voices.

SOME BASIC TRAITS AND THEMES

Since the theologies of liberation coming out of diverse groups and situations reflect the concreteness of the struggle in which they are involved, there is no such thing as a "general" or "universal" theology of liberation. And yet, there are some common traits.

The first of these is that all theologies of liberation are politically concrete. They do not seek to be universal, for they know by bitter experience that what is usually called "universal" is too often the

projection of the values, self-image, and interest of a powerful group. In a white racist society an "average" human being is depicted as white. In a sexist society, male domination seems normal, and males take for granted that the fruit of their philosophical and theological reflection has nothing to do with their gender or position of dominance.

This emphasis on concreteness and particularity appears in the various theologies of liberation. Mexican theologian Raúl Vidales has said that "There has never been a 'universal' theology, and even less has there existed a neutral one."⁴ Likewise, James H. Cone states that "Black theologians must work in such a way as to destroy the corruptive influence of white thought by building theology on the sources and norms that are appropriate to the black community."⁵ Therefore, although there are many points of contact, and certainly a common perspective, joining the various theologies of liberation, it is important to keep in mind this emphasis on concreteness, in order to avoid the temptation of becoming a preacher of a universal liberation theology or of someone else's liberation—which is what easily happens when some white males decide to preach liberation.

A second common characteristic of liberation theologies is that the main category with which they work is that of history. A significant segment of traditional theology deals with truth, understood in terms of changelessness and universality. Others seem to believe that the basic category of the biblical message is that of law, doing what is proper and orderly. But liberation theologians know that supposedly "universal" truth is too often the projection of the particular views and interests of the powerful, that changelessness is a value espoused by those who benefit from the status quo, for whom change would be threatening, and that law is most cherished by those who have the civil law and order on their side. As we read the Bible, what we see in it is not so much a book of eternal truths, nor a book of rules, as a book of history. In the Bible, truth is not something that "is," in the sense in which Parmenides used that word, but rather something that happens. And laws are given, not to stifle that happening, but to foster it. This is why Cone says that "In the Bible revelation is inseparable from history and faith. History is the arena in which God's revelation takes place."⁶ And Letty M.

Russell speaks both for feminist theology and for other theologies of liberation when she asserts that "Most liberation theologies are written from the modern point of view that both humanity and the world are to be understood as historical, as both changing and changeable."⁷

This understanding of history, however, has to be clarified. History is not simply the narration of past events. History is a project, both divine and human, for the redemption of God's creation. "If theology is really to speak meaningfully about the mediating point between the 'is' and the 'ought' of human life," says a feminist theologian, "then it takes as its base the entire human project."⁸ And Gustavo Gutiérrez: "Indeed, if human history is above all else an opening to the future, then it is a task, a political occupation, through which man orients and opens himself to the gift which gives history its transcendent meaning: the full and definitive encounter with the Lord and with other men."⁹ James Cone agrees: "By making revelation a historical happening, the Bible makes faith something other than an ecstatic feeling in moments of silent prayer, or an acceptance of inerrant propositions. Faith is the community's response to God's act of liberation. It is saying Yes to God and No to oppressors."¹⁰

A third common characteristic of liberation theologies might appear at first glance to be at odds with what has just been said. Liberation theology refuses to limit itself to the themes most directly and obviously connected with its struggles. This is one of its most puzzling characteristics for those who look at it from the outside. Liberation theology is not a theology *about* liberation which is then content to leave all the other theological themes to traditional theology. On the contrary, it is convinced that its insights have a bearing on every single doctrine of the Christian faith, and that it is therefore a legitimate theology. "Feminist theology is *not* about women. It is about God."¹¹ And "when black people sing, preach, and tell stories about their struggle, one fact is clear: they are not dealing simply with themselves. . . . It is this affirmation of transcendence that prevents Black Theology from being reduced merely to the cultural history of the black people."¹²

For this reason, liberation theology deals with every theme in

Christian theology, from the doctrine of God to that of the last things.¹¹ But it deals with each and all of these themes from the perspective of its particular struggle and action—what some liberation theologians call “praxis.”

It is obviously impossible to discuss here all the themes with which liberation theology deals. But in order to illustrate them, we shall deal very briefly with three of them: the doctrine of God, anthropology, and eschatology.

All liberation theologians are agreed that the God of the Bible is not the impassible, ineffable, immutable One of so much of traditional theology. Involved in their particular struggles as they are, they experience faith in a God who is active, who is involved with them in the struggle. This is the meaning that they see in the biblical phrase, “the living God”—a meaning which is amply supported by the incarnation of God in Christ. Out of that *praxis*, of that faith in action, they reflect both on the God of Scripture and the God of traditional theology and come to the conclusion that the impassible and ineffable One, far from being a better way to speak about the God of Scripture, is an idol. It is an idol of changelessness developed, albeit unwittingly, by those who are threatened by change, because the present order works in their favor. Liberation theologians can then point out that the philosophers who inspired this understanding of the Godhead were the same who boasted that philosophy was “the occupation of the idle,” which obviously means those who, because of their social standing, do not have to work and do not wish to see that situation change. It is therefore not surprising that such philosophers produced, and bequeathed to later generations, a view of perfection as changelessness, and of change as that which threatens the very notion of perfection. In general, theologians who have followed the lead of such philosophers have been in similar social circumstances.

The fact that God is active also means that God is *not* neutral. This is the point which many find most disconcerting in liberation theology. They would prefer to speak of a God who deals with all in the same manner, like the blindfolded justice standing in front of our courthouses is supposed to do (although she appears to hear the sound of money and somehow seems to see people's color in spite of

her blindfold!). But liberation theologians tell us that God did not deal equally with Pharaoh and with the children of Israel. God's justice is equalizing, because it is unequal. James Cone has said this in startling words: “Black theology cannot accept a view of God which does not represent him as being for blacks and thus against whites. Living in a world of white oppressors, black people have no time for a neutral God.”¹²

God judges “for the meek of the earth” (Isa. 11:4 emphasis added). It is this God, very different from the idol of our society, that liberation theologians discover in the midst of their struggle and in their theological reflection on that struggle.

If we then turn to anthropology, liberation theology rejects the notion that God is best served by our self-abasement. Too often has the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith been presented in such a manner. It is significant that many of those who tell us that humility is the greatest virtue, or that the root of all sin is pride, are doing so from prestigious pulpits and endowed chairs. The tone of the Bible is very different. There the beauty of creation is used to exalt God, and the human creature is seen as the crown of that creation (Ps. 8). Nowhere does the Bible tell us that we are called to be nothing. Rather, we are told that we are made after the divine image, that we are heirs of the Kingdom, children of God, priests and royalty. Any supposed humility that denies this is sinful, for it rejects the divine plan for creation. And yet, traditional theology has often been bent on promoting the virtue of humility, particularly since those who are humble will stay in their place and refuse to claim their rightful status in human societies as children and heirs of God.

Also, still in the realm of anthropology, liberation theologians are asking why is it that in so much preaching and teaching in the church “sin” is usually equated with an inner attitude, or at best with private misdeeds, and so seldom with the sort of sin most often condemned in the Bible, of “those who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room” (Isa. 5:8). Why is it that our society, partly through the influence of Christian preaching, has practically come to equate sin with sexual disorders, while ignoring social injustice?¹³ Could it not be that once again, and quite unwittingly, Christian theology has been serving the interests of the powerful?

Finally, when it comes to questions of eschatology, liberation theologies are showing that the understanding of "salvation" which has been bequeathed to us is rather truncated. The Bible deals much more with the kingdom of God and the Holy City, than with individual life after death. Life after death is part of the biblical message; however, in Scripture eternal life is usually placed within the context of a new social order. The Kingdom is not so much a place where all will be floating around in the presence of God, as a new order in which "they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid" (Mic. 4:4). It is within that new order, the Kingdom, that eternal life takes place. Eternal life does not consist in being plucked out of history, but in being a participant in its culmination. In the present life, therefore, our task is to move toward that new order, to work for it, to announce it, and to train for it.

Again, this understanding of the goal of history has not been popular among the powerful because it would subvert the present order. As long as history and eternity are two parallel realms, with little relationship to each other, our task in history is to gain access to eternity—by being meek and accepting. But if history is part of eternity, and its purpose is to move toward the Kingdom, if the goal of history itself is that all shall sit under their own fig trees, it follows that our present system of land tenure must be revised. If salvation is seen as having one's soul go to heaven, those who exploit our bodies may even be seen as helps in that process. But if salvation is moving into a new order, which includes the entire human being, then we must strive against everything which at present denies that order.

Thus, at every point of Christian doctrine, liberation theology asks two basic questions: What does it really mean when we see it from the clearer vantage point of the oppressed? And, what is the hidden agenda in the interpretation which has been handed down to us?

LIBERATION AND THE TRAP OF PATERNALISM

If liberation theology is by definition theology done by those who have traditionally been powerless, how can it be useful to those who, by nationality, gender, race, or economic status, are to be classified

WHAT IS LIBERATION THEOLOGY?

as powerful? Most of the ministers in the main-line churches and most of the members of their congregations would be in that category. Can they appropriate and use such a theology without falsifying it? Can it speak to them as well as to the powerless?

There is great danger in the use of liberation theology by those who are generally thought of as the oppressors rather than the oppressed. It is one thing to find the gospel a liberating word to oneself. It is quite a different thing to believe ourselves agents for the liberation of others from a bondage we have never experienced. We are then in the position of announcing the power of a gospel for which we ourselves have no need in our own lives. Precisely because such agents of liberation have never actually experienced the bondage they now address, it is easy for them to oversimplify the problems and misunderstand the situation, both in its causes and in its cures. This can rapidly lead to frustration, especially if the easily seen cures do not work or are not accepted by those whom the agents seek to help.

Even more to the point, it is difficult to tell the role of "liberating agents" from traditional oppression. Such a role implicitly involves a sense of knowing what is good for the oppressed group, and the feeling that they are unable to advance without us. This role may actually be an unconscious cover for a continuation of earlier domination, though now with a more acceptable, "liberation" rhetoric employed. It involves little change in the underlying structures of power. Needless to say, the various liberation movements are suspicious of such agents. It is a significant thing for a black to help other blacks to be aware of their oppression and to take steps to work against domination by whites. It is significant when a woman helps other women to see and work against the domination of men. But for a white or a man to play the role of liberating agent is another matter entirely. The response of the oppressed group will probably be that the contribution of the traditionally powerful person may be helpful, but only in a supportive role, not in a leadership or even in a diagnostic one. The response may also be that they could be of more use in their own group of whites or of men, working for a change in structures that would alter the distribution of power.

The response of liberation theology to such offers of assistance

from the powerful will probably include the strange idea that part of the uselessness of the powerful is that they are not really very powerful at all. Many white, middle-class liberal Christians in this country readily and constantly feel a sense of guilt for their position of affluence in a world beset by problems of hunger and poverty. Obviously, there is ample reason for such a sense of guilt. Yet often such guilt leads to the conclusion that we are guilty because we voluntarily chose such affluence. We created the problem and we can therefore alter the situation. The feeling of guilt is acceptable to us as long as we can also have the sense that we, unlike the oppressed we wish to help, are free and independent members of society. We can decide to assist those who are downtrodden to help them attain the status we have. It is not so pleasant to think of ourselves as both guilty and powerless. The thought that the vast majority of us who see ourselves as free are really the captives of the same structures and forces that cause the poverty we wish to eliminate is difficult to accommodate. Yet this thought is essential if we are to see how liberation theology can relate to our preaching and to many of our churches.

This is not the same as to say that we are all oppressed in one way or another and thus we can be rid of our sense of guilt. That will not do at all, though such an attitude often occurs when we discover our own powerlessness. Nor is it legitimate to spiritualize the meaning of bondage and say that some of us are captives of poverty and others of sin, but ultimately we are all in the same situation. This would imply that we need not deal with our role as oppressors at all, since ultimately all are oppressed. The reality of racism and colonialism, and the evils of injustice must be dealt with. The sense of guilt on the consciences of the comfortable must be nurtured and not assuaged.

Yet the truth remains. We are not the free people we often think we are. The bondage under which we live is subtle, and we are sufficiently rewarded that we do not notice our lack of freedom. The structures that buy or lease land in the Third World and displace people, causing them to become part of the inhuman slums of the sprawling cities, are the same structures that govern much of our lives as well. From products to pricing, from values to self-images, from advertising to television programming, our lives and those of

our children are determined in ways that would startle our great-grandparents. If we try to alter things we discover that even regulatory agencies and government itself are strongly influenced by these same interests. Change is neither easy nor always possible. Our own employment may well be governed or at least financed by the same systems, and if we cry out too loudly, we are made aware that it is not wise.

What does all of this have to do with liberation theology? If we take it seriously, it has a great deal. If we can become aware of the social, political, and economic systems that control our lives, we may then find ourselves on the same side of the struggle as those who are the outcasts of those systems. We can then speak from our own experience of bondage and of the problems and frustrations in seeking to be free. We can know what it means to come to consciousness about our own exploitation, even though we fully recognize that our bondage has been quite comfortable. Only then can we really seek to be free.¹⁶ We can find ourselves learning about such struggles from those whom we charitably tried to help before. They can become our teachers, rather than we theirs. The poor, precisely because they are at the margins of the system, may well know more about its actual working than we who are kept within it. Within the church there is great possibility for such a conversation because the church has within its membership all races, economic groups, and social conditions, and is spread over the face of the earth. Yet our local congregations fail to take constant advantage of this truly catholic character of the church and, in their own congregational life, fail to reflect it.

Liberation theology is significant for us when we seek to become free from actual oppressive structures that bind us. Wherever we, who think ourselves powerful, find that we are, indeed, bound, such a theology can inspire us to have the courage to challenge and to act as the redeemed children of God, as those who are indeed not conformed to this world.

For most of us in this country, liberation theology, to be useful and authentic, demands a kind of double personality. Our consciences must continue to remind us of evil from which we benefit while others suffer. Our awareness of this must increase and

not decrease. Our affluence, even though it hardly seems that in comparison to richer neighbors, still is more than our share of the world's resources. Besides this, however, most of us find ourselves in multiple roles. We are the powerful by race if we are white, yet among the powerless if we are women. We are part of a powerless group if we are in an ethnic minority, yet if we are well educated and employed, we join the powerful in that category. Even within the family structure, the child is often the last victim of those who have no one else over whom to rule and yet are oppressed themselves. Our tendency is to claim only one part of our identity, to think of ourselves always as part of an oppressed group or to think of ourselves always as the powerful. A much more creative dynamic is possible when we claim both parts of our identity, and the liberation given by the gospel can nurture a constant interior dialogue within our own lives. It can also open our lives to a far greater dialogue in the world around us. Then liberation theology can speak to us and to our congregations, making clear and judging our roles as oppressors, but also making clear and freeing us from whatever powers bind us, even those forces that bind us into the role of oppressors in the wider society.

II. DIFFICULTIES IN HEARING THE TEXT

Since the main task of the preacher of liberation is to listen anew to the biblical text, this chapter and the next two will deal with the question of biblical interpretation. In the present chapter, we shall discuss some of the obstacles which impede a liberating interpretation, and in the others we shall deal with some resources for overcoming those obstacles.

SOLA SCRIPTURA

One of the main principles of the Protestant Reformation was that of *sola Scriptura*—the sole authority of Scripture in questions of faith. The Reformers themselves did not agree on the scope and application of that principle. Some, like Luther, meant by it that anything which was contrary to the clear words of Scripture should be rejected, while traditions that did not contradict the Bible could—and normally should—be retained. Zwingli and others went much farther and sought to do away with anything that was not clearly supported by Scripture. But in spite of these differences, all agreed that the reason why the Reformation was needed was that, to a greater or lesser degree, the tradition of the church made it difficult, if not impossible, to read the Bible correctly. Thus, in a sense, the Reformation of the sixteenth

The Words of Worship: Beyond Liturgical Sexism

Our growing awareness of the sexist problems inherent in our language provides us with a valuable new hermeneutical tool.

JAMES F. WHITE

★ THE PROBLEM of sexist language in worship has caught up with us; there is no avoiding it any longer, though I still hear many evasions. The most common excuse: "Language is not that important." My usual rejoinder: "How long has it been since you last used the term 'nigger'?" So long as someone uses that less-than-human term for a black person, it is impossible for him or her to progress toward racial justice. Language is not an indifferent matter, as Earl Butz discovered. A change in speech habits is necessary if we are to change attitudes.

No longer do we have a choice to be concerned or not about sexist language. A fundamental issue of justice is involved, and the church cannot be silent in matters of justice without being a disobedient church. Obedience to Christ means according justice to others just as we desire justice for ourselves. To determine what constitutes justice in this instance, to be sure, may not be simple, but we should have little difficulty in agreeing that an obedient church has no choice about opposing injustice.

The importance of public worship in this matter is only slightly less obvious. Nowhere else does the average Christian so frequently take part in explicit theological statements and actions as in Christian worship. Nothing helps form a Christian's thinking about God and one's responsibility to others so persistently as continued engagement in public worship. Worship shapes the theology of the laity through the weekly repetition of constant elements of worship plus unique local and temporal elaborations of them by the gathered community.

Feminine Images

Let us begin with the good news. Our growing awareness of the sexist problems inherent in language provides us with a valuable new hermeneutical tool. It opens to us aspects of God's word to which we have hitherto been deaf and provides us with a deeper sensitivity for hearing what God says through Scripture. One soon realizes the importance of accurate biblical translations. Frequently the original texts make no indication of gender; it has been supplied gratuitously by translators. This is

true of the pronoun *tis*, often translated "a man" instead of "anyone." In many cases, sexual distinctions have been dubbed in for the sake of readability by modern translators when these distinctions do not exist in original texts. More nearly accurate translations would not make such arbitrary distinctions. Such knowledge ought to be an incentive to more intensive study of the Scriptures in the original languages.

But there is a more important level of awareness, sensitive to the variety of metaphors in which Scripture refers to God in feminine images. Jesus, for instance, in an image rarely used in worship, refers to himself as wishing to gather people together as a "mother hen gathers her brood under her wings" (Matt. 23:27, Luke 13:34). Only one who has kept chickens can know how protective a mother hen is and what a marvelous image she is of divine protectiveness. In the prologue to John's Gospel, translators shy away from an exact rendition of the last verse (1:18), which says literally, "God's only begotten, he who is in the Father's breast." The word *kolpos* (breast) rarely makes it into English, the RSV being an exception here. Apparently even the faint suggestion of female anatomy for God troubles us, though anthropomorphisms abound in Scripture.

We feel uncomfortable with such passages as Deuteronomy 32:18: "You forsook the creator who begot you and cared nothing for God who brought you to birth." Jesus compares his death and resurrection to labor pains and childbirth (John 16:21). Much of our theology of Christian initiation might be more balanced if the image of new birth had developed throughout history as did images of incorporation or forgiveness. New birth is equally as prominent for initiation in the New Testament. Baptismal regeneration became a most controversial term, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries. A positive approach to the birth images in baptism (John 3:5, Titus 3:5) gives an important dimension to God's gift of new life in the body of Christ.

Prenatal and Postnatal Events

Protestantism has yet to recover those aspects of Christology witnessed to by some of the minor christological feasts. It is probably no accident that,

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despite widespread recovery of much of the Christian year, Protestants have not seen much value yet in the feasts of Naming, Presentation, Annunciation and Visitation. The biblical evidence, of course, is in the first two chapters of Luke, but there is far more there than just shepherds and angels. Prenatal and postnatal events are part of the history of salvation, though we ignore them. The Annunciation (March 25) has had powerful appeal to the greatest painters of past ages; we have looked in another direction, though this feast once signaled the start of the civil year. It still marks the beginning of the climactic event in the salvation of the whole human race. And it is entirely in the hands of a woman. Traditionally an angel is sexless, and the only other person in Luke 1:26-38 is a woman, Mary. There are parallels with her kinswoman, Elizabeth — John is not the only forerunner. Visitation (May 31) has intrigued musicians with the *Magnificat*. In the *Magnificat* the social creed of the Christian church is articulated in its most concise form — all in the context of a dialogue between two peasant women (Luke 1:39-56).

The postnatal stories are too good to miss, too. The Naming of Jesus (Luke 2:21) stresses Christ's identification with human society, particularly in receiving a common Hebrew name on the eighth day (January 1). The Presentation in the Temple (Luke 2:22-38) on the 40th day (February 2) is the first event in which humans proclaim the meaning of the Christ child. And that proclamation comes first from the lips of the elderly — a man and a woman, Simeon and Anna. What a difference it would have made if the church had based its theology of ordination on these two prototypical proclaimers of God's word! I cite these passages only to show rich images that we would probably not have overlooked if they had been masculine. Fresh sensitivity to the female role in the process of salvation will help us discover other elements in God's word which we have missed.

Limiting God, Limiting People

There seem to be two stages in applying our sensitivity about sexist language in worship: the negative stage of eliminating exclusive language and the positive one of developing language that affirms both sexes. Unfortunately, most who have worked in this field have been content with the first of these. *Actually we need language even more explicitly sexual than that we now use — language that affirms both sexes in our knowledge of God and of humanity.*

The negative stage, of course, is very important. It comes in the realization that the English language has definitely changed in the past decade and that such terms as "man," "mankind," "men" and the masculine pronouns are no longer being used in the familiar generic sense. This change has been recog-

nized by the National Council of Teachers of English, a group more likely to acknowledge current usages than to initiate new ones.

The negative stage has two implications for the language of worship. First of all, it becomes increasingly problematic to limit God to masculine images — and the words "he," "his" and "himself" are no longer so inclusive as they once were. Words that imply that God is masculine, as these pronouns now do, are much more restrictive and limiting in naming God than such terms were in the past. Today a hymn, a prayer or creed that uses these pronouns says something much more narrow than it did a decade ago. Since we hardly want to set limits to God, these words must be replaced by more inclusive language. This task challenges us to broaden our comprehension of the deity. The Section on Worship of the United Methodist Church has published a list of 200 ascriptions for God. Perusal of this fascinating document can lead to an expansion of our language for addressing God and our comprehension of the Giver of Love. The first step is the purgative one of eliminating language that is now exclusively male in our speech about the Redeemer of Israel.

Second, the same negative stage is necessary with language regarding people. In the past, it meant one thing to say "who for us men and for our salvation." Today, that phrase means something quite different. The new International Consultation on English Texts (ICET) translation, now used by many denominations, says "for us and for our salvation." There is no more need to limit people today than to limit God. The negative step means pruning away terms that are exclusive in present use: "man,"

Annunciation

✦ DOWN! downward plummets Gabriel
in his annual flight
on spangled wings, his voice of gold,
his visage silver-bright.

But Mary greets him with a yawn,
a cold, inquiring, "Well?"
until he fairly cowers to say
the joy he came to tell,

And stammers in his voice of gold,
the jeweled jaw shocked shut,
when Mary in her voice of brass
shrugs and snaps, "So what?"

Poor Gabriel! He blurs the news,
and flaps away, unsure,
for modern-day Magnificats
are not what once they were!

GLORIA MAXSON.

"men," "mankind." Salvation is for all, not for just one sex, as these words now imply.

Inclusive Terms

The positive stage, on the other hand, is both more creative and more difficult. It is the phase in which we develop inclusive terms for our understanding of God and for our speech about humanity. It implies an even more explicitly sexual language than we now use, but a language in which female and male terms are balanced. It means that when God created us in God's own image, we were created male and female. We do not seek a gray, sexless imagery, as if God created us neuter, but the rich coloration of both sexes. This effort is not easy; it is simpler to follow the familiar monochrome. But when we take this step, we soon find that our visions of both God and humanity are greatly expanded.

How do we reach this creative stage? We begin with Scripture and tradition. We find, once we start looking, traces scattered everywhere of the female side of God, the feminine half of humanity. Eleanor McLaughlin reminds us that Chrysostom could call God "Sister, Mother" and Anselm could pray to Jesus as Mother. It helps to know that Chrysostom and Anselm could do it. We need to recall the medieval debates on the Christian life as reflecting either Mary or Martha. Our first steps must be taken on familiar ground but with a keenness of sight we have never had before. We must discover the femi-

nine images already available in Scripture and tradition before we can develop new ones.

A word of caution may be helpful. It now seems that more recent materials, especially hymns, are the worst linguistically. Not until the 20th century did hymnists get aroused about the brotherhood of man. Victorians were not concerned about "lesser breeds without the law." But the "good guys" of the social gospel could cry: "Join hands, then, brothers of the faith," meaning something twice as inclusive as those words now signify. Others could sing: "Till sons of men shall learn thy love," or "The voice of God is calling/ Its summons unto men," not realizing how exclusive those lines would sound today. Someone has suggested that we need to change only one letter in another hymn: "Wise up, O men of God!" All these and many more hymns now suggest the opposite of what they intend. Consequently, they may have to go unsung for a time.

What do we do with much of the older hymnody and language of prayer? I do not believe that it should all be discarded, though one can be more selective in choosing it. There are plenty of alternatives to singing "Good Christian Men, Rejoice." But even that can be mended once people learn to substitute "folk" for "men," "one" for "man," and "humans" for "mankind." In so doing, we are really reinforcing the writer's intentions by translating a previous language into a present one. And there are some surprisingly good words we never before appreciated, such as the 15th century "O Sons and Daughters, Let Us Sing." The translations of the International Consultation on English Texts will be helpful for creeds, canticles, doxologies and the Lord's Prayer. One can check the new *Episcopal Book of Common Prayer* (1976) or the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978) to see ways by which exclusive sexist language has been avoided, though less intentionality in providing language that affirms both sexes seems evident.

Acknowledging the Limits

There is bad news, too. We need to know the limits before we can do anything responsibly new in worship. There are some things we ought to do that we have not done; there are also things that we ought not to do. It is only by knowing the limits that we can get a more radical view of unexplored possibilities.

First of all, we are not free to rewrite Scripture. There is no doubt that the world view within which it was written was patriarchal. We must be careful to distinguish between those things that were culturally contingent and those things which are essential to the gospel. Paul says many things about women which reflect his culture. But he also makes what must be the most radically egalitarian statement in all of Scripture, in Galatians 3:27-28: "Baptized into union with him [Christ], you have all put on Christ

Dark Advent

+ BEGUILLED by cold we enter winter's ark,
the sky behind us narrowing to wink.
In vain we hold a candle in this dark.

The solstice reaches in its falling arc
far as rank clouds can stretch or sun can sink.
Beguiled by cold we enter winter's ark.

We probe for life in evergreen's dry bark,
but limbs are strung with needles black as ink.
In vain we hold a candle in this dark.

We hope through laughter to engage a spark,
but ice has frozen humor's ductile link.
Beguiled by cold we enter winter's ark.

With groping faith a savior's birth we mark,
since Mary's term is ending now, we think.
In vain we hold a candle in this dark,

for virgin birth's induced by song of lark
and virgin milk is summer's warming drink.
Beguiled by cold and locked in winter's ark,
in vain we hold a candle in this dark.

KATHRYN CHRISTENSON.

as a garment. There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female; for you are all one person in Christ Jesus." This equality is based on baptism. It does not hurt to know that women baptized persons in the early church, that fonts have been designed in the shape of a pregnant woman, that womb imagery is clear in the Easter vigil, or that Calvin and Wesley, on the other hand, were vehemently opposed to women baptizing. The more we look, the more we find.

But Scripture cannot be rewritten, though it frequently deserves retranslation. *Anthropos* can be translated "human being" instead of "man," but we cannot use *anér* as anything but "man." I do not think we can change the word "Father" when it appears in Scripture. But, as indicated above, we have numerous possibilities for addressing God in prayer. I now realize it was wrong of me for many years always to begin grace at the family table with the words "Heavenly Father," especially with my three daughters and wife present. I had countless other options and never exercised them. How narrow an image of God that one ascription now implies! My images of God have grown since I began reaching out for alternatives to that invariable "Heavenly Father."

We are not free to avoid the masculinity of Jesus Christ, who, as a concrete human individual, had to have sexuality. But the important thing is not that Jesus became man but that he became human, one of us with whom every woman and man can identify. Thus the clause in the creed of the United Church of Canada, "who has come in the true Man, Jesus," no longer means what it did in 1969. The important thing is that God became human, not that God became masculine. Still, I do not yet see any alternatives to referring to the second member of the Trinity as "he" or "him."

God-Talk and People-Talk

Okay, those are the limits; but what are some of the possibilities in actual worship language? Pronouns give us the most trouble. Many times our prayers would be greatly improved by rigorous excision of any third-person pronouns. Simply say "you" when speaking of God, and in almost all cases it will be a better prayer by being made vocative. Of course, this language will not work in parts of the service not addressed to God. Here we can change "God . . . he" to "God . . . God" or to some such naming as "God . . . our Sovereign," "God . . . his" can give way to "God . . . God's" or some such possessive as "God . . . our Sovereign's." The really difficult pronoun is the reflexive. I have turned "God . . . himself" into "God . . . Godself." I admit I do not like neologisms, but I find that, with use, "Godself" becomes less abrasive and reminds me that I am speaking of a God who is more than masculine. The easy way is to avoid the reflexive



altogether, but I am fond of speaking of God as giving Godself to us (as in the sacraments), and nothing other than a reflexive is strong enough to say that adequately.

With regard to humans, we have many possibilities. I do not find it strained to double pronouns; I do not mind saying "he or she" or "hers or his," or "him or her" every time a third-person pronoun is necessary. I do not like "he/she" or "s/he," as one does not speak slashes. Written language, in my opinion, should correspond with spoken, not vice versa.

There is also a wide variety of instances in which it is not awkward to say "women and men." In Chaucer's time the words "brethren" and "sistren" were both used, but the latter was lost (about 1550), to our impoverishment. More inclusive terms ought to be used if it is clear that such is intended ("poet" and "Jew" rather than "poetess" and "Jewess," which happen to be diminutives). Words that now clearly indicate sex ("man," "mankind") should be balanced with their parallels ("woman," "woman-kind"). If such exclusive terms cannot be balanced, then it is better to avoid them in preference for single inclusive terms such as "people" and "humanity."

It should be clear that we have just begun to explore new possibilities both in God-talk and people-talk. There are no ready-made answers. Some things will sound awkward for a while, just as, not so long ago, addressing God as "you" did. Familiarity soon makes novelties sound natural. "Godself" may not bother us for long, or we may find a better reflexive. But I am convinced that we cannot remain content with "God himself" much longer.

A search which begins because of the imperative of justice may have major side effects in helping us come to a more profound knowledge of God and the

people of God. Such a search can stretch our concepts and understanding of God in unexpected ways. And it can put us in deeper contact with our own humanity. We may find that, in trying to give others their due, we ourselves receive as much in return. The concern about sexist language is a major means for changing attitudes.

There are plenty of nonverbal changes needed in worship—some as elementary as moving beyond

preaching robes with padded shoulders (an irrelevant masculine image of ministry), using women and children as ushers, and electing female bishops. But words are certainly among our most important formative elements. The present birth pangs of the church are a sign of health. We must move to language that affirms both women and men. Together, both constitute the world that Christ came to save. □

IMAGINING GOD INCLUSIVELY

To begin the task of imagining God inclusively, I can implement in my own thought-patterns the biblical insight that "God is spirit" -- not by degrading body and elevating but rather by emphasizing the universal dimensions of the "spiritual body" of God-in-Christ. John 4:24 gives assistance in that direction, telling me that "God is spirit; and those who worship [God] must worship in spirit and in truth." This statement offers the worship-experience to everybody because no one is cut off from access to spirit, to that which is intangible yet so real that we call the absence of it death and the presence of it life. Prison walls cannot cut a person off from spirit, nor can color, or poverty, or lack of education. It is true, of course, that tyrannical societies seek to break the spirit in order to render an individual thoughtlessly obedient. But it is significant that God takes special care of people whose spirits have been broken: "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick" (Ezekiel 34:16).

It is the cumulative effect of female experience which warns me against using "God is spirit" in the traditional way of setting up a hierarchy, with spirit superior to body. For centuries, females have been associated with the body and its passions, while males have associated themselves with the mind and spirit, with reason. And the concomitant value-judgement has been, of course, that Reason (good) must control Passion (evil). From there it has been only a tiny step to the association of females with the demonic and males with the deity. I think that enough has been written on this subject in recent years that I need not labor the point.

Most Christians are aware that biblical injunctions about living "in the spirit" rather than "in the flesh" are not aimed at defamation of the physical body, but rather are used to distinguish between locating one's ultimate identity in the private, localized ego-consciousness ("the flesh") as opposed to locating one's ultimate identity within the universal "spiritual body" shared with all created beings and amounting to more than the sum of its parts (the Body of Christ, "the spirit").

There is nothing bad about the physical body and nothing bad about the localized ego-consciousness, although from the biblical standpoint there is something temporary about both. The body that will be resurrected will apparently be qualitatively different, a "spiritual body", according to I Corinthians 15:44; but the fact that body is slated for resurrection says something about

the goodness of body. And the consciousness which knows as it is known (I Corinthians 12:12) is also qualitatively different from the severely limited temporal consciousness. It is only when my human ego absolutizes itself and the physical body it resides in that I am thrown into a state of alienation from God (the Wholeness of Being and Becoming) and hence from all other creatures. Inevitably at such times, I fear the death of my physical body and want my own advancement more than anybody else's.

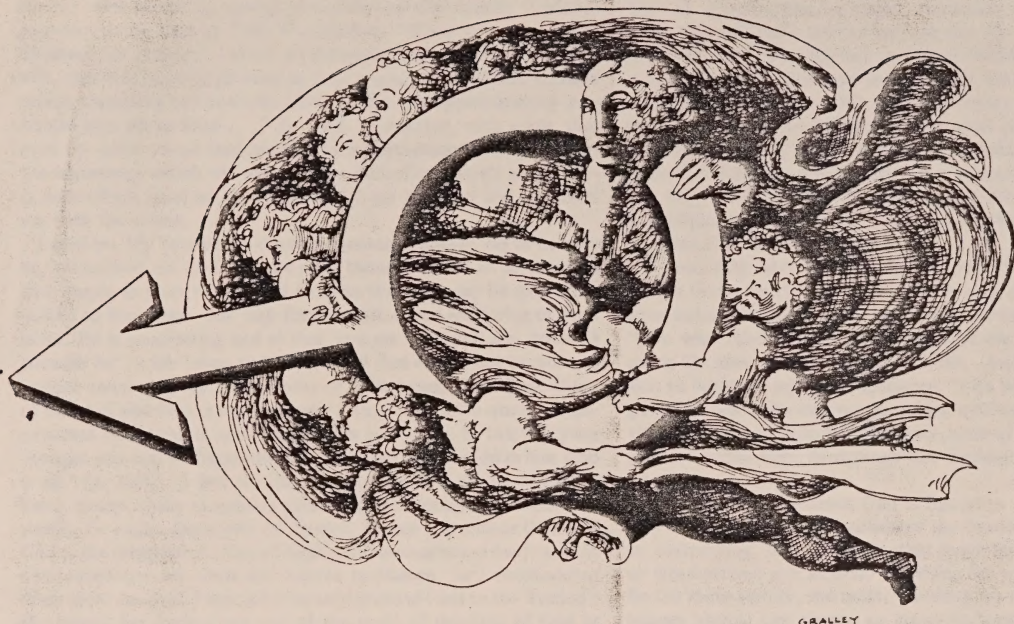
In the New Creation, there is no exclusion of anybody on any basis whatsoever. According to Galatians 3:27-28, we all become one person, one body inside one garment (the Christ). For centuries, of course, the representatives of the church have been speaking of the Messiah, the Christ, as God incarnated, spirit embodied, Word enfleshed, divinity humanized, humankind divinized. But not many have taken the next logical step of recognizing that if that is true, then it makes perfect sense to imagine the Christ as female, black, Indian, Oriental, poor Appalachian white, or indeed as any form created beings can take. (I think of Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem addressed to Christ, who for him broke forth from the sight of a falcon riding on the wind -- "The Windhover: To Christ our Lord.")

The Christ is in no created form exclusively, but in all such forms inclusively ("in him all things hold together," Colossians 1:17). For in the New Creation, "there is one body and one spirit...who is above all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:4-6). This kind of imagining, based squarely upon an inclusive reading of Scripture supports social justice because it makes available to every human being the empowerment of identifying herself or himself with the divine. It also provides the best possible basis for restraint and respect in the use of natural resources.

Second, I can learn to think of the word God as the designation of an office or role (the whole Structure and Process of Reality) rather than as a masculine word denoting a physical masculine person like Jove on Mount Olympus. The problem of imagining exclusively a Goddess or Great Mother is that it tends to fragment the same way that literalistic imagining of God as exclusively Father has done. Worse yet, because of centuries of patriarchal condescension toward women, feminizing a word immediately tends to trivi-

In Unity is privileged to be the first to print this excerpt from Dr. Mollenkott's book, *Speech, Silence, Action!* to be published in 1980 by Abingdon.

Dr. Virginia Mollenkott



alize it. Apart from a small contingent of feminist theologians, people feel that the role of diety is split and trivialized by feminizing the word used to designate it. The feminist theologians who prefer to speak only of the Goddess will, of course object that is exactly their point: the human consciousness must learn to recognize the female as equally as divine as the male. That point I must fully agree with; but I doubt that designating the office of diety as Goddess is the way to go about it. Let us make some analogies to illustrate what I mean.

The moment one speaks of a chairwoman, because of social conditioning the imagination pictures garden clubs and theater parties. The word chairperson was invented to allow both males and females to imagine themselves in such leadership roles. But in actual practice chairperson has not been used when men chaired (they remained chairmen) but only when women were chairing. The end result was not an advance for women, but a wipe-out of our bodily nature, our femaleness. Chairperson has therefore only made matters worse.. The solution would be either to use the neutral word chair as a noun as well as a verb, or to view the word chairman as a designation of office or role rather than as sexually differentiated. In this case I think the word chair is clearly the more satisfactory solution, since it focuses on work to be done (chairing) without designating the sex of the doer.

Alma Graham wrote several years ago about the "language of equal opportunity," arguing that women are invariably trivialized when jobs are labelled as if work varied according to the sex of the worker. When I came across Graham's article, I recalled that

Katharine Hepburn, who has a powerful self-concept, has always referred to herself as an actor, not as an actress: she is "one who acts on the stage or screen." By analogy, a woman who writes books is an author, not an authoress; a woman who executes a will is an executor, not an executrix; a woman who is elected to the highest post in her government is a President, not (God forbid!) a Presidentrix or a Presidentress. Similarly, jobs should properly be named by the work performed, irrespective of the sex of the performer. So I should train myself to think of an insurance agent rather than an insurance man, a telephone line repairer rather than a lineman, an oil deliverer rather than an oilman, a mail carrier rather than a mailman, a member of Congress rather than a congressman. Such language makes it possible for any human being to make imaginative identification with any job and thus be empowered to seek it.

If, then, society learns to think about the word God not as the name of a specific person (analogous to Jove) but rather as a job description or the designation of an office --the only office that contains no limitations whatsoever, and certainly not the limitation of human sexuality --then we will have opened up that concept to every human being. The fact that the Bible uses the word God for the One Deity and the same word for pagan idols (uncapitalized) seems to indicate that the word is to be thought of as designating an office (Supreme Being) rather than a proper name. And

the fact that both male and female are made in God's image and designated as God's agents (Genesis 1:26-27) ought to help demolish the notion that the term God is sex-defined (or confined).

In this connection, I am reminded of my reaction when first I read the anonymous medieval work called *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Having been reared on strictly propositional Christianity, I was astounded to be told in *Privy Counselling*, "When you go apart to be alone for prayer . . . reject all thoughts, be they good or be they evil. See that nothing remains in your conscious mind save a naked intent stretching out towards God. Leave it stripped of every particular idea about God . . ." (p. 149). I realized, with a jolt, that even my ideas about God are part of my ego-consciousness, part of the knowledge which will vanish away, part of my private judgment-system which must be relinquished if I am to enjoy real communion with the divine.

I read on. My fourteenth-century mentor, whoever she or he may be, counselled me that "I want your thought of self to be as naked and simple as your thought of God, so that you may be spiritually united to him without any fragmentation and scattering of your mind. He is your being and in him, you are what you are, not only because he is the cause and being of all that exists, but because he is your cause and the deep center of your being. Therefore...think of yourself and him in the same way: that is, with the simple awareness that he is as he is, and that you are as you are. In this way your thought will not be fragmented or scattered, but unified in him who is all" (p. 150). I feel no doubt that were that medieval mystic living today, those masculine pronouns concerning God would instantly be either expanded or deleted. Clearly the author thinks of God as the designation of an all-inclusive Presence beyond any human comprehension, let alone any human limitation. As I encountered these great insights, I realized how very grateful I felt to the Women's Movement for forcing me out of the mold of thinking of God as somehow definable according to human categories. And for that reason, a switch to Goddess-language is for me only a return to a mind-forged manacle, not liberation at all.

But I do consider it essential to bear witness to my belief that the word God designates an office and not a male being. To do this I must consistently use inclusive pronouns or a least avoid male pronouns. I prefer to repeat the term God rather than to use a limiting and therefore misleading masculine or feminine or neuter pronoun. This gets especially sticky when I need to use a reflexive construction. I could try James W. White's solution ("God gave Godself"), which is certainly better than "God gave himself." Or I could say "God gave herself/himself/itself" as an awkward but insistent way of driving home the absolute inclusiveness of the Godhead.

The thesis of *The Cloud of Unknowing* is that as long as I am living within the limitations of morality, God will remain surrounded by a cloud of unknowing that I can in no way penetrate cognitively, but only by love. This realization is, the author assures me, truly liberating: "For in the realm of the spirit heaven is as near up as it is down, behind as before, to left or to right. The access to heaven is through desire We need not strain our spirit in all directions to reach heaven, for we dwell there already through love and desire" (p. 127). Although we twentieth-century people may flatter ourselves that through the scientific world-view we have liberated ourselves from naive understandings of the universe and of a God-out-there, this fourteenth-century person understood plenty! And she or he would probably feel sorry for us as we flounder around struggling with God-language in almost primitive naivete about the nature of worshipping "in spirit and in truth."

Third, I can stimulate more inclusive imagining of God by using a variety of biblically based epithets or ascriptions. In Old English poetry, word-pictures were drawn by use of compound epithets called kennings, so that the ocean might be spoken of as the "whale-path," a king as a "ring-giver," or a sword as a "fire-flasher." Use of Kenning-like epithets concerning God would serve as reminders of God's myriad roles in my life. Continual, repetitive reference to God as Mother or Father focuses attention on beginnings, on God's creatorial and parental functions only. (Even so, sometimes referring to God as Parent rather than as either Mother or Father forces me to think about what parenting is apart from sex roles: what is its essence?) But constant searching for fresh biblical metaphors would widen my awareness of what God does not only over, but also through and in the creation: Sea-walker, Light-bringer, Sin-forgiver, Star-kindler, Whirlwind-speaker, Food-supplier, Life-restorer, and so forth.

Prayers may address God simply as you, but when that feels too abrupt or my heart is overflowing with love, all sorts of phrases may grow out of scriptural-usage. "you who have healing in your wings," "you who inhabit Eternity," "you who are my rock," "you who swing the stars in space," and so forth. And they may, of course, also be based on my own experience: "you who are my shield from gossip," "you who visit me on golden eyelids," "you who have provided the love of friends." Naturally, none of this denies the importance of single-word ascriptions like Redeemer, Sustainer, Friend, Comforter, or Guide.

Since all language about God is figurative and limited and probably to some degree a distortion of the One hidden within the Cloud of Unknowing, and I need constant reminders that no single phrase or word-picture can possibly be telling the whole truth about God. So the more variety, the better. Getting in a rut of a few too-narrow images tempts any person or group to forget that we do not yet know as we are known. From that kind of forgetfulness springs idolatry, the absolutizing of our own minds and their imagery.

Fourth, I can help myself imagine God more inclusively by continuing to explore the female imagery occasionally applied to God in the Old and New Testaments. Although I included many such images in *Women, Men, and the Bible* (Abingdon, 1977) and added some more in the cassette study course by the same title, once in a while I come upon new ones. For instance, it excites me that when Jesus spoke to his disciples about the future time when they would have to do without his physical presence in the world, he described his own suffering and the history of suffering humanity through a birth-metaphor: "When a woman is in travail, she has her sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world" (John 16:21, RSV). A few minutes later, John tells us Jesus began his prayer with the words, "The hour has come." Thus he identified the anguish of the cross with the pangs of giving birth, and identified himself with a woman in labor. His pain would be forgotten as soon as he had given birth to the New Humanity.

One reason this image excites me is that this very passage was part of my personal oppression. My gynecologist was a professing Christian, and when it was time for me to go into the hospital to give birth to Paul, he quoted to me what he probably still quotes to every woman as she goes into labor: "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world" (KJV). Because he had told me that my child would be a girl, my heart wrenched when I heard the reference to a man-child. As a new contraction started, I groaned, "But what if it's a girl?" He shrugged, "Oh, I don't imagine the sex of the baby matters much to God." Nevertheless, I was triumphant.

phant when I had a boy, partly because, unconsciously, I was convinced that John 16:21 really implied that boys were better than girls. To the detriment of my self-respect, I continued to think so for many years. No wonder: not only the King James Version, but also contemporary versions like the New English Bible, the Phillips New Testament in Modern English, and the Jerusalem Bible all speak of the joy of man's birth! Yet the Greek word translated "a man" clearly means "a human being." In such ways has female presence and power in Scripture--and in the imagination of religious women--been nearly eradicated.

As biblical feminists keep coming up with new awareness of the female aspects of the Godhead, I think several cautions are in order. One of them is that I doubt the wisdom of separating off the Holy Spirit as the feminine Person of the Holy Trinity. Such separation breaks the unity of the One Godhead, as if there were really three gods in Christianity, two of them male and one of them female. Besides, such separation still leaves the female in the minority, eternally "outvoted" by a two-to-one power bloc, and therefore does very little for the female self-concept. In addition, the Bible utilizes female imagery in connection with all three Persons of the Trinity, and I believe it is best to mirror scriptural usage as much as possible. However, because we are engaged in struggling out of the shackles of patriarchy, we will want to increase the proportion of female imagery concerning the Godhead; and of course we will want to take special pains to affirm the right of all human beings to imagine God in the ways that empower them as blacks or Indians or Orientals or whatever.

My second caution is that we must not imagine that the use of feminine imagery concerning the Godhead will be enough by itself to bring about an end of sexist oppression in society or even in the church community. Unless the "feminine" roles and aspects of God are valued as highly as the "masculine" roles and aspects, our sense that "the Lord our God is one" will still be fragmented, males will still be encouraged toward primacy, women will still be diminished into secondary status, and community will still be broken. My favorite illustration of this comes from one of the sermons of the great seventeenth-century English poet and preacher, John Donne. Because he was a careful student of the Bible, Donne occasionally spoke of God in feminine terms; but he regarded God-as-Mother as distinctly more "inferm" and unquestionably "inferior" to God-as-Father. Consequently, at a wedding he felt free to speak of the woman as the man's "staff," commenting that after all, nobody values his staff as much as he does his own legs. It would be hard to imagine a more flagrant violation of the injunction in Ephesians 5 for husbands to love their wives "as their own bodies"; but Donne and his congregation were reading the Bible through sexist-colored glasses.

As long as people continue to value spirit more than body, then images of God feeding her children will be pre-empted in Christian imaginations by male priests in flowing gowns handing out bread and wine and washing the dishes afterwards upon the altar. Whereas I in no way minimise the political effects of the way human beings imagine God's appearance, I want to point out that the process can work in the other directions as well. Changes in societal structures will help our imaginations become more inclusive and empowering. When fathers share fully in parenting tasks and mothers share fully in spiritual leadership, and when single persons and gay persons are highly respected in church and society we will all be in a better position to imagine God more expansively. ■

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home, good, obedient to husbands. (Titus 2:4)

It has not been publicly stated (in this position paper) that the women's movement rejects the Bible concept of God, Christ, the church and the home. It is now known that a Bible believer could not be a part of this movement. It is time for the great majority of women to let it be known that these latter day prophets of the Women's Liberation Movement do not speak for them.

The women express their amazement and disgust but hear the speech out. After the preacher leaves,

they begin to question whether this attitude is not a part of the reality they will have to face when they return home. They then begin to raise questions that were never fully explored in the work group: Is women's liberation really anti-Christ? How do we deal with Christ? Is it satisfying to say that he is a feminist? Why have we avoided all week dealing with him?, etc. The refrain from Dorie Ellzey's song, "I'm in the water and the bathtub is gone," is begun again. And that is it. We are out of the Garden and in the water. Where do we go from here? □

good tidings of great joy:

biblical faith without SEXISM

Phyllis Tribble

BIBLICAL FAITH CHALLENGES the faithful to explore treasures old and new. In this context I propose to examine interactions between the Hebrew Scriptures and the Women's Liberation Movement. Unlike some commentators, I believe that the two phenomena have something to say to each other. Unlike others, I do not think that the relationship between the two need be hostile. The intentionality of biblical faith—as distinguished from a description of biblical religion—is neither to create nor to perpetuate patriarchy but rather to function as salvation for both women and men. Thus the hermeneutical challenge is to translate faith without sexism.

One approach to this translation is through themes that implicitly disavow sexism. I suggest three such themes: (1) Israel's theological understanding of Yahweh as a deity beyond sexuality. Unlike fertility gods, Yahweh is neither male nor female but Creator and Lord who embraces and transcends both sexes. (2) The theme of freedom from oppression that the Exodus narratives present so compellingly. Of special interest are the women who nurture this revolution: Hebrew midwives, an Egyptian princess with her maidens, and Hebrew slaves, mother and daughter, unite to defy Pharaoh, the male oppressor. Alone they take the initiative that leads to deliverance (Exodus 1:15-2:10). (3) An understanding of corporate personality is appropriate for eliminating sexism. The oppression of one

individual or one group is the oppression of all individuals and all groups. Conversely, the liberation of one sex is the freedom of the other.

Exegesis: Genesis 2-3

Another approach to this translation is the exegesis of passages specifically concerned with female and male. The story of creation and fall in Genesis 2-3 is one such passage.

Ambiguity characterizes the meaning of 'adham in Genesis 2-3. On the one hand, man is the first creature formed (2:7). The Lord God puts him in the garden "to till it and keep it," a job identified with the male (cf. 3:17-19). On the other hand, 'adham is a generic term for humankind. In commanding 'adham not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the Deity is speaking to both the man and the woman (2:16-17). Until the differentiation of female and male (2:21-23), 'adham is basically androgynous: one creature incorporating two sexes.

Concern for sexuality, specifically for the creation of woman, comes last in the story, after the making of the garden, the trees and the animals. Some commentators allege female subordination based on this order of events. But the last may be first, as both the biblical theologian and the literary critic know. In Hebrew literature the central concerns of a unit often appear at the beginning and the end as an

polysto device. Genesis 2 evinces this structure. The creation of man first and of woman last constitutes a ring composition whereby the two creatures are parallel. In no way does the order disparage woman. Content and context augment this reading.

The context for the advent of woman is a divine judgment: "It is not good that 'adham should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (2:18). The phrase needing explanation is "helper fit for him." In the Old Testament the word helper (*'ezer*) has many usages. In our story it describes the animals and the woman. In some passages it characterizes Deity. As the helper of Israel, Yahweh creates and saves (Exodus 18:4; Deut. 33:7; Psalm 121:2). Thus *'ezer* is a relational term; it designates a beneficial relationship; and it pertains to God, people and animals. By itself the word does not specify positions within relationships; more particularly, it does not imply inferiority. Position results from additional content or from context.

Accordingly, what kind of relationship does *'ezer* entail in Genesis 2:18, 20? Our answer comes in two ways: (1) the word *neged*, which joins *'ezer*, connotes equality: a helper who is a counterpart. (2) The animals are helpers, but they fail to fit *'adham*. There is physical, perhaps psychic, rapport between *'adham* and the animals, for Yahweh forms them both out of the ground (*'adamah*). Yet their similarity is not equality. *'Adham* names them and thereby exercises power over them. No fit helper is among them. And thus the narrative moves to woman. My translation is this: God is the helper superior to man; the animals are helpers inferior to man; woman is the helper equal to man.

In creating woman the Lord God "caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man." Man has no part in making woman; he is out of it. He exercises no control over her existence. He is neither participant nor spectator nor consultant at her birth. Like man, woman owes her life solely to God. For both of them the origin of life is a divine mystery.

Another parallel of equality is creation out of raw materials: dust for man and a "rib" (side?) for woman. Yahweh chooses these fragile materials and processes them before human beings happen. As Yahweh shapes dust and then breathes into it to form man, so Yahweh takes out the "rib" and then builds it into woman. To call woman "Adam's rib" is to misread the text, which states clearly that the extracted material required divine labor to become female, a datum scarcely designed to bolster the male ego.

Moreover, to claim that the "rib" means inferiority or subordination is to assign the man qualities

over the woman that are not in the narrative itself. Superiority, strength, aggressiveness, dominance and power do not characterize man in Genesis 2. By contrast he is formed from dirt; his life hangs by a breath that he does not control; and he remains silent and passive while the Deity shapes his existence.

The "rib" means solidarity and equality. *'Adham* recognizes this meaning in a poem:

*This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh.
She shall be called woman ('ishshah)
because she was taken out of man ('ish) (2:23).*

The pun proclaims both the similarity and the differentiation of female and male. Before this episode the Yahwist has used exclusively the generic term *'adham*. Only with the specific creation of woman (*'ishshah*) does the first specific term for man as male (*'ish*) appear. In other words, sexuality is simultaneous for woman and man. The sexes are interrelated and interdependent. Man as male does not precede woman as female but happens concurrently with her. Hence, the first act is the creation of androgyny (2:7), and the last is the creation of sexuality (2:23). In responding to the woman, man speaks for the first time and for the first time discovers himself as male. No longer a passive creature, *'ish* comes alive in meeting *'ishshah*.

Next the differences that spell harmony and equality yield to the differences of disobedience and disaster. The serpent speaks to the woman. Why to the woman and not to the man? The simplest answer is that we do not know. The Yahwist does not tell us any more than he explains why the tree of knowledge of good and evil was in the garden. But the silence of the text stimulates speculations, many

Resource Materials

are available for readers who want to explore further the issues raised by these articles. Church Women United (7820 Reading Road, Cincinnati, Ohio 45237) has produced a multimedia packet on the 1972 Grailville conference. Material on the 1973 conference and a packet on women are available from Grailville, Loveland, Ohio 45140. In addition a booklet of the 1973 proceedings of the working group of women and religion of the American Academy of Religion is directly related to this issue. Copies may be ordered from CSR Executive Office, Waterloo Lutheran University, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3C5, Canada.

of, which only confirm the patriarchal mentality that conceived them.

A Female Speculates

Let a female speculate. If the serpent is "more subtle" than its fellow creatures, the woman is more appealing than her husband. Throughout the myth she is the more intelligent one, the more aggressive one and the one with greater sensibilities. Perhaps the woman elevates the animal world by conversing theologically with the serpent. At any rate, she understands the hermeneutical task. In quoting God she interprets the prohibition ("neither shall you touch it"). The woman is both theologian and translator. She contemplates the tree, taking into account all the possibilities. The tree is good for food; it satisfies the physical drives. It pleases the eyes; it is aesthetically and emotionally desirable. Above all, it is coveted as the source of wisdom.

Thus the woman is fully aware when she acts, her vision encompassing the gamut of life. She takes the fruit and she eats. The initiative and the decision are hers alone. She seeks neither her husband's advice nor his permission. She acts independently. By contrast the man is a silent and bland recipient: "She also gave some to her husband and he ate." The narrator makes no attempt to depict the husband as reluctant or hesitating. The man does not theologize; he does not contemplate; he does not envision the full possibilities of the occasion. His one act is belly-oriented, and it is an act of quiescence, not of initiative. The man is not dominant; he is not aggressive; he is not a decision-maker.

Even though the prohibition not to eat of the tree appears before the female was specifically created, she knows that it applies to her. She has interpreted it, and now she struggles with the temptation to disobey. But not the man, to whom the prohibition came directly (2:6). He follows his wife without question or comment, thereby denying his own individuality. If the woman be intelligent, sensitive and ingenious, the man is passive, brutish and inept. These character portrayals are truly extraordinary in a culture dominated by men. I stress their contrast not to promote female chauvinism but to undercut patriarchal interpretations alien to the text.

The contrast between woman and man fades after their acts of disobedience. They are one in the new knowledge of their nakedness (3:7). They are one in hearing and in hiding. They flee from the sound of the Lord God in the garden (3:8). First to the man come questions of responsibility (3:9, 11), but

the man fails to be responsible: "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate" (3:12). Here the man does not blame the woman; he does not say that the woman seduced him; he blames the Deity.

If the Yahwist intended to make woman the temptress, he missed a choice opportunity. The woman's response supports the point. "The serpent beguiled me and I ate" (3:13). Only here occurs the strong verb *nsh'*, meaning to deceive, to seduce. God accepts this subject-verb combination when, immediately following the woman's accusations, Yahweh says to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all animals" (3:14).

Though the tempter (the serpent) is cursed, the woman and the man are not. But they are judged, and the judgments are commentaries on the disastrous effects of their shared disobedience. They show how terrible human life has become as it stands between creation and grace. We misread if we assume that these judgments are mandates. They describe; they do not prescribe. They protest; they do not condone.

Of special concern are the words telling the woman that her husband shall rule over her (3:16). This statement is not license for male supremacy; rather it is condemnation of that very pattern. Subjugation and supremacy are perversions of creation. Through disobedience the woman has become slave. Her initiative and her freedom vanish. The man is corrupted also, for he has become master, ruling over the one who is his God-given equal. The subordination of female to male signifies their shared sin. This sin vitiates all relationships; between animals and human beings (3:15); mothers and children (3:16); husbands and wives (3:16); man and the soil (3:17, 18); man and his work (3:19). Whereas in creation man and woman know harmony and equality, in sin they know alienation and discord. Grace makes possible a new beginning.

A further observation about these judgments: they are culturally conditioned. Husband and work (child-bearing) define the woman; wife and work (farming) define the man. A literal reading of the story limits both creatures, and it limits the story. To be faithful translators we must recognize that women as well as men move beyond these culturally defined roles, even as the intentionality and function of the myth move beyond its original setting. Whatever forms stereotyping takes in our own culture, they are judgments upon our common sin and disobedience. They are marks of our fall, not of our creation. What then shall we do?

Exegesis: Song of Songs

The Song of Songs provides at least a partial answer. In it the Paradise described in Genesis 2 and destroyed in Genesis 3 has been regained, expanded and improved upon.

Canticles begins with woman speaking. She initiates love-making:

*Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth,
for your love is sweeter than wine (1:2).*

In this first poem (1:2-2:6) she calls herself keeper of vineyards (1:6). In the last poem (8:4-14) she returns to this motif (8:12), even as she concludes the unit by summoning her beloved (8:14). Thus the overall structure of the Song is a ring composition showing the prominence of the female. Within this design another *inclusio* emphasizes women. The daughters of Jerusalem commence and close the second poem (2:7 and 3:5).

As in Genesis 2-3, the ring composition of the Song of Songs encircles a garden. Person and place blend in this imagery.

*Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its
choicest fruit (4:16c).*

The woman is the garden (4:10-15), and to the garden her lover comes (5:1, 6:2, 11). Together they enjoy this place of sensuous delight. Many trees adorn their garden, trees pleasant to the sight and good for food (cf. Gen. 2:9 and Song of Songs 2:3). Fountains of living water enhance further this site (4:12, 15), inviting comparisons with the subterranean stream watering the earth (Gen. 2:6) and with the rivers flowing out of Eden to water the garden (Gen. 2:10-14).

Animals inhabit two gardens. In the first they were formed, both beasts and birds, and received their names. As foils they participated in the creation of woman and provided a context for the total joy of 'ish and 'ishshah. In Canticles their names become explicit as does their contextual and metaphorical participation in the encounters of lovers (see 2:9; 4:1-2, 5; 5:11-12).

Work also belongs both to the garden of creation and to the garden of eroticism. Clearly man works in Eden and implicitly woman too. The Song alters this emphasis. The woman definitely works. She keeps vineyards (1:6; cf. 8:12), and she pastures flocks (1:8). Her lover may be a shepherd too (1:7), though the text does not secure this meaning. By analogy he is a king (1:4, 12; 8:11, 12), but he neither rules nor dispenses wisdom. He provides luxury for the sake of love (3:9-11).

Together Genesis 2 and the Song of Songs affirm work in gardens of joy, and together they suggest fluidity in the occupational roles of woman and man. In Canticles nature and work are pleasures leading to love, as indeed they were before the primeval couple disobeyed and caused the ground to bring forth thorns and thistles, and work to become pain and sweat (2:15; 3:16, 18, 19).

Parental references merit special attention. Seven times the lovers speak of mother, but not once do they mention father. The man calls his beloved the special child of the mother who bore her (6:9), even as the woman cites the travail of the mother who bore him (8:5). This concern with birth is also reminiscent of the theme of creation in Genesis 2. In yearning for closeness with her lover, the woman wishes he were a brother nursing at the breast of her mother (8:1).

But these traditional images do not exhaust the meaning of mother. It is his mother who crowns Solomon on the day of his wedding (3:11). The female lover identifies her brothers as sons of her mother, not of her father (1:6). And most telling of all, the woman leads her lover to the "house of her mother" (3:4; 8:2). Neither the action nor the phrase bespeaks patriarchy. This strong matriarchal

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CHAPTER 2

Contemporary Issues in Theology and Ministry Which Impinge on the Diaconate

Not only is it important to historically contextualize the diaconate problem in the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches; but we must understand that the U.F.M.C.C. itself is a product of and participant in a very contemporary matrix of theological/ecclesiological, social issues and movements. In order to really discover the diaconate in M.C.C., we must understand M.C.C.'s unique context.

M.C.C. began as a church movement in response to the desperate spiritual, social and political needs of gay men and lesbians in a homophobic society. The internalization of oppression had for centuries destroyed gay people. Only in the last few years has there been any real documentation on the cost of oppression in the lives of lesbians and gay men: the rejection, the feelings of self-hatred, the isolation, despair, the physical and emotional abuse, accompanying drug and alcohol addiction, suicide, or resignation to lives of "quiet desperation." That does not include the systematic genocide of gays which has occurred in many cultures even in this century. M.C.C. was founded in the service of liberation from these ills, in the service of bringing God's love home to those who believed they were outside the gates forever. Soon after M.C.C. was founded, the contemporary gay rights movement really began to take hold. But why a Church? Reverend Troy Perry, M.C.C.'s founder, had always been conscious of the importance of the black churches in the civil rights struggles of the 1960's, and U.F.M.C.C. took some cues from that struggle. From the beginning, M.C.C. was a church founded in the service of liberation.¹

Secondly, as the church grew, it encountered other movements that paralleled and challenged it. The contemporary feminist critique of culture and domination radically affected the Fellowship. As lesbian feminists, and gay men who identified with feminism began a dialogue within the Fellowship, U.F.M.C.C. began to wake up to women's needs, to the need to critique patriarchal values, structure and language. That challenge has been consistently painful, but consistently in the forefront of the Fellowship's identity-formation process as a church in the service of liberation.²

Obviously, the history of the diaconate within the Christian Church largely excluded women. There has been much debate over the meaning of the word in 1 Timothy 3:11 that refers to women. Does it mean "wives" or "female deacons" (deaconesses)? Most contemporary scholars now believe it means female deacons.³ Apparently there were female deacons and female church leaders in the early church, particularly in Asia Minor.⁴ But, again, as the monarchical episcopate became the dominant ecclesiology of the Church, the role of women diminished. The charismatic, fluid style of the earliest Church had broken through some of the barriers of sexism, which barriers were quickly re-erected in the ensuing centuries. Once the diaconate was no longer permanent, but a stepping stone to the priesthood, of course (!) women could no longer become deacons. Some churches, such as the Episcopal Church, compromised by having a permanent order of deaconesses who were not deacons in the male Episcopal sense, and who could not, therefore, become priests. This has all now changed in the Episcopal Church in the U.S. with the ordination of women as deacons and then priests.

As a Church founded for gay men and lesbians; and, as a Church being confronted with the feminist critique, one would assume there could never be any question about women in ministry in the U.F.M.C.C. But quite honestly, there was some question in the beginning. But that quickly changed, and the assumption that women would be electable and ordainable to any office within the U.F.M.C.C. was accomplished. Presently, one third of our professional ministers are women, and four sevenths of our highest administrative body, the Board of Elders, are women. In most local churches in the U.F.M.C.C. women are on the board, are exhorters and deacons. And, in those Churches where that is not true, it is at least theoretically true that a woman may not be prohibited from holding any office. There has been a continuous critique of the traditional church structure, and style insofar as it in any way reflects the "Dionysian" model or is based on patriarchal domination, repression and control. Which model of the Church, we are asking, is consistent with the feminist critique of culture? Can we respond in our structures and order of ministry to contemporary prophetic voices, voices which echo the prophets of Israel and the servanthood ministry of Jesus the Christ?⁵

More recently, the U.F.M.C.C. has had to begin to face contemporary social and theological questions regarding race and class.⁶ We have been an American-based Church that has tried to image itself as international. Only in the last few years have we begun at all to reach out to non-white or non-western peoples. As we do that, we discover our own racism, classism and American bias. That, too, has been and is becoming, a painful experience. A church in the service of liberation that is racist and classist cannot authentically preach or live out its calling from God-in-Christ. So, as we tentatively venture into South America, as we attempt to help re-settle gay Cuban refugees, as we join with a Maoris church from New Zealand, we allow the cries and needs and vision of the Third World to impinge on

us. How can a church in the service of liberation free itself from the strangling bonds of privilege? Can the U.F.M.C.C. really open itself up to the theology of relinquishment?⁷

Another issue that is connected to these, and a part of the matrix is the clergy/laity question. The more we learn of the origins of ecclesiastical offices and orders, the more we understand them to be rooted in a misogynist, classist, self-serving history.⁸ What is the relationship of ecclesiastical office to ministry? Does the clergy/laity split always end up with the clergy as the do-it-all ministers, and laity as the passive observers? Does it always end up repressing the true gifts of all the people? How do we most effectively minister in the world? Do we need professional ministers? For what purpose? Where does the diaconate fit into our understanding of the ministry? Are deacons merely "amateur clergy?" Are they "clericized laypeople?" Neither and both? Should they be ordained? Elected? Appointed? To whom are they accountable? What is their role?

Finally, what model of the church is most appropriate for the U.F.M.C.C.? Which model will allow this church in the service of liberation to respond to its calling? Which model will adequately provide the basis for an authentic diaconate in the U.F.M.C.C.?

These are the questions which formed the basis for both the survey and the training program which follow.

'We Had to Sacrifice the Woman'

Social and Sexual Forces Between Pulpit and Pew

THOMAS H. TROEGER

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king's horses and all the king's
men
Couldn't put Humpty together again.

✦ THE WOMAN'S voice, a ball of buoyant sound, rolled effortlessly from the pulpit to the last pew of the chapel. Her eyes shone, and conviction animated her body so that her listeners felt a strong personal presence in the pulpit. As Katherine's teacher, I knew that she was trying to develop her own distinctive mode of preaching. In earlier classes she had revealed a great love for the black Baptist tradition in which she was raised. Yet she had also indicated that as a woman with a particular vision of ministry, she would be delivering sermons in a style different from that of the male preachers she had heard. It was a matter not of disowning her roots but of claiming the integrity of her witness.

"Like Humpty Dumpty, our society is in pieces, and it seems that all the king's men and all the king's horses, all our technology and all our knowledge, cannot put us back together again."

The class had responded enthusiastically to Katherine's first sermon, a nurturing message about using our different gifts in the body of Christ. But today's sermon was moving into more troubled waters.

I

"We are in pieces: Republicans and Democrats, conservatives and liberals, men and women, blacks and whites. Today I want to look at just one of those splits, that of blacks and whites."

The issue was a live one in the chapel where Katherine preached: the class consisted of herself, five white women, four black men, and three white men. We were always working hard to help the preacher without imposing our peculiar biases and traditions on the person. So when Katherine signaled that she was going to examine the split between blacks and whites, the atmosphere thickened with the anxiety of confrontation.

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"There is a pressure cooker in the ghetto." Katherine's hands began to move together as though she were trying to compress an invisible basketball that kept expanding. "Society keeps trying to pack it down. And although I do not usually consider myself a prophet of future events, I think it is going to blow to pieces in the '80s." Katherine's hands sprang apart as though a coiled spring were released, and we in the pews could feel the energy rushing toward us.

"And yet I believe there is a word of hope. This morning I want to speak about just one thing that we can do to heal the split between blacks and whites. . . . We can preach the gospel."

At this point the sermon became weaker—as Katherine herself later agreed—because it dealt in generalities and preachers' phrases without the bite of specific illustrations. However, as she moved into her conclusion, it became more pointed, naming issues of medical care and housing and employment—all problems that she had encountered in her summer ministries during seminary.

At the end Katherine came out of the pulpit carrying a ball of pink yarn. Saying she wanted to symbolize the hope and unity we had as Christians, she had us toss the ball of yarn among ourselves until we were all holding onto the unwound strand. Then Katherine led us in singing "Bless Be the Tie That Binds." At the end of the song we released the yarn and came forward to share in our response to the sermon, as we do in every class.

II

Susan, a white Unitarian who has been on the front lines for many social causes, responded first: "I just want to say that I loved the sermon. I know that's not a very helpful response. But I did. Maybe it's because I am white, and I need to hear from a black person that there is at least some kind of hope."

Charles, a black Baptist, told first what he liked in the sermon: "Its note of hope—I needed that." Then he shared his reservation: "I am afraid the sermon did not get deep enough into the pain in the ghetto. Maybe the hope came too easily to be real." Charles

identified precisely what was weak in the sermon, and his kind manner helped several other class members to share their responses.

But the mood of the class changed when another black student, Leon, said: "I felt the sermon was an attack on the black men in this class when you mentioned the 'sacrifice' involved in preaching the gospel. Blacks have been sacrificing for too long, and it's time for them to be grabbing their share of the pie." I pointed out that, in fairness, to Katherine, she was not talking about black people in general but about preachers, black and white alike, needing to preach the social demands of the gospel even when that might not be the popular thing to do. But the vehemence of Leon's next response indicated that we were dealing less with the content of Katherine's sermon than with the rage that fueled his speech. "I am telling you, the sermon was an attack. I felt it as an attack."

Another black student, Richard, now entered the conversation—at first speaking in the same tone as Charles, critical but helpful. "I think I heard what Katherine was trying to do. She was trying to find some hope in a pretty hopeless situation, and that is a hard thing to do. We are talking about men in Buffalo whose hearts have been cut out, children in Atlanta who are disappearing. She mentioned these things, but she didn't deal enough with the existential pain in the situation." His words came haltingly, gingerly, as though he were aware that Leon's anger was hot enough to evaporate whatever anyone said.

At this point, Eleanor, a white Presbyterian, ten years older than Katherine, reached toward her with support. "I appreciated what you were trying to do in the sermon. We do need hope. But I was thinking of some blacks I worked with this summer in my own inner-city parish, and you were right about that pressure cooker. It is ready to explode. I felt that last summer, and I felt it in your hands." Eleanor imitated Katherine's gesture with the invisible basketball. "But maybe Charles is right; you made the hope come too easily to be real."

(Continued on page 124)

Sacrifice

(Continued from page 108)

Eleanor, though her voice was edged with the anxiety that Leon had touched off, was trying to reintroduce Charles's more helpful tone, identifying what was good in the sermon and looking at what needed strengthening.

But Leon did not pick up on the shift in the conversation. He took off from Eleanor's criticism and lashed out, distorting what Katherine had said and missing altogether that she had spoken

to the issues of housing and medical care which he mentioned. Leon began to dominate the class. By now, his vocal quality had changed from the full-blooded anger of his earliest response to a more whining, petulant tone. It was as though he had moved from an adult's rage to a child's tantrum. The class, which had enjoyed many healthy arguments in the past, began to retreat into silence, sensing that this time conversation was no longer possible.

Richard, meanwhile, adopted Leon's angry tone. He began: "What the black

male members of this class are trying to say is . . ." I pointed out that not all the black members of the class were saying the same things. One had been silent throughout. Another, Charles, had spoken earlier but had become quiet.

III

Our time was up, and people were off to other classes and appointments, except for Katherine, who stayed behind to view the videotape of her sermon. She was devastated. She had preached a good sermon that did, as she acknowledged, need to deal more with the struggle in the ghetto. But this weakness in the message was not enough to account for the disproportionate anger of the reaction. Other students had preached similar sermons with similar weaknesses, but none had awakened this kind of ranting.

What had happened?

Something primordial had come out in the all-consuming petulance that marked the closing minutes of class. I shared with Katherine the substance of a Conant lecture that Nancy French had delivered last winter.

Women in positions of authority, said French, are apt to awaken the preverbal relationship with mother. So long as they are supportive and nurturing—as Katherine was in her first sermon—those who follow them are grateful. But if the woman authority figure challenges rather than soothes, calling for sacrifice, the listeners may respond from a child's sense of having been denied gratification. Ostensibly they will deal with what was said, but in tone and manner they will reveal that the controlling emotional reality is the relationship to mother. They will be speaking as more than isolated individuals. They will be giving expression to undercurrents of thought and feeling that are rumbling through the whole group. Hence, the class response and even Katherine's sermon revealed forces greater than the motions of their individual psyches.

When I shared this idea with Katherine, she began to recover from her devastation and to analyze some of the responses of the class. "They weren't even talking about what I said. I sensed that, but I didn't know what was going on." We then looked again at her sermon for clues. The nursery rhyme and the pink yarn stood out in bold relief. Katherine, eager to develop her own style, had drawn on symbols from the feminine world that intensified the subconscious



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"There was more to it than that though," continued Richard. "There was the fact that Katherine had not realized fully enough the pain we feel about what is happening in the ghetto, and there was the reaction of the entire class as Leon and I began to attack Katherine. Eleanor [the white Presbyterian woman] bonded with Katherine to give her female support in the face of the attack of us males. Others retreated into silence, following the pattern of fight-flight that we learned in Professor Ashbrook's course last year. Afraid of the way we had identified ourselves as the 'black males,' the rest of the class did not dare to come to Katherine's aid. It was wrong, but we got caught up in it, and there was no way to stop it, at least not just then."

While Richard was speaking, the entire class nodded their heads, each affirming the accuracy of Richard's remarks. His words were like an exorcism, naming the demon that had pervaded the class and thus driving it out and freeing us to understand what had happened.

V

Several weeks later, I was still talking with students and reflecting on the primordial sexual forces between pulpit and pew. I have certainly had people attack my preaching, but never have I received quite the irrational, petulant treatment that is sometimes given to women and that I observed firsthand in Katherine's case. *We had to sacrifice the woman.* I cannot get Richard's

words out of my head. They make me see why people balk at feminist theology, inclusive language and women preachers.

The resistance runs deeper than a well-reasoned theological position. It is grounded in the relationship to mother. I do not say this as someone eager to be labeled "a Freudian" or wanting to point the finger at dear old mom and blame all our ills on how we were weaned and toilet-trained. But the intensity of reaction, in women and men alike, indicates that the feminist transformation of theology will have to work at even profounder levels than language and mythology. As important as these are, they remain verbal, and the resistance is coming from preverbal experience.

Yes, language and liturgy, mythology and images must change, but when people fight these changes, it will not be adequate to argue back at a rational level. The tighter knots in the soul will have to be untangled. And that means the final locus of the transformation will be in communities of men and women who care enough about each other to stay together even when the sexual forces erupt in devastating ways. Nothing less than a commitment to the Truth who is greater than all the compacted powers of our psyches can make such a community possible. In the preaching class it was the students' common loyalty to God that by a hairbreadth kept them from giving up on one another.

The assumption of authority by women in our churches is a test of our claim that there is "neither male nor female but all are one in Christ." Is this merely theological cotton candy or the steel twine of reality? If we run from the explosive sexual forces between pew and pulpit and glibly say, "Oh sure, I accept women in the ministry—I see no problems," then we will be fooling ourselves, and we will fail to see the revelations that God is making through the feminist movement.

Seminary classes and church study groups that jump on people when they resist changes in language and metaphor instead of probing where that resistance is coming from will not establish a community where there is justice regardless of sex. But if women and men together look at the recesses of their souls, trusting in the One from whom no secrets are hid, then the light will shine, and they will grow toward "mature adulthood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." □

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response in terms of a child's relationship to mother, with its explosive ambiguities of gratification and denial. Leon and Richard had in turn reacted with the childish vocal quality and fractious ranting that went beyond their comprehensible adult anger.

Leon confirmed this analysis when I walked into the dining hall for a cup of coffee. He stood up and said: "Well, are you going to give me 15 lashes?"

"I'm not in the business of giving people lashes. Why do you think I ought to be doing that to you?"

"Because of what happened in class."

"And what was it that happened in class today?"

"Oh, a lot of things were going on."

"Yes, I think a lot of things were going on. And I think we need to talk about them."

Leon agreed. That afternoon he came by my office and we talked. This time there was no child speaking but the sharp, adult intelligence that I had come to respect in Leon. He spoke to me man to man—and I use those words deliberately. He told me about his work in a prison, how "pink yarn won't tie those bitter men together," and how hurt he had been that Katherine had not dealt adequately with the fierce pain he felt about what happens to black people in prison and on the streets of the ghetto. I told Leon that if he had spoken as directly out of his experience in class and with the same passionate but mature voice, Katherine and everyone else would have heard him. I shared with him the analysis of sexual forces I had discussed with Katherine. Leon was skeptical about it, but at the end of our conversation he came back to it on his own, even though he denied its truth.

IV

During the week I had several conversations with students and with three black colleagues, trying to understand more fully what had happened. At our next class period I brought to the lecture session our current pastor-in-residence, a superb black preacher who had the respect of the entire class. We had talked extensively about what had happened earlier, and he knew the incident would probably come up in the course of his presentation on prophetic preaching. It did. First, a white male and later Katherine raised the issue, pointing out that she had tried to take a strong stand for justice, and we all knew what had happened to her. She

wanted ideas on how to handle herself in the future.

The pastor took Katherine's question seriously, pointing out that since he was not a woman he could not speak precisely to her experience, but indicating that he had often received virulent responses that were disproportionate to the sermon that set them off. He talked about "living through the pain" of those reactions and trying to understand the deeper realities that had been hooked in his listeners. Because the pastor, a black male, had addressed Katherine's question seriously, it was now a topic open to the entire class across racial lines. I built on his re-

marks and outlined the nature of the preverbal response pattern that seemed to have been touched off in class.

When I finished, Richard nodded his head in agreement and said, "Yes, I think some of that is true, that stuff from Nancy French. I think the little boy did come out in me, and I coluded with Leon and we became a little bit like a tribe, and we had to sacrifice the woman." These words in print do not convey the tone of self-realization and genuine apology that now marked Richard's voice, nor do they describe the feeling of relief that pervaded the class as Richard's acknowledgment lifted the load of gloom.

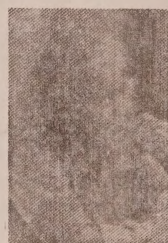
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